

The Crisis Within: An Examination of Internal Crisis Communications

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About the Author

Allen Sommerfeld has over 18 years of communications experience in the public and private sectors. Currently, he is the Senior Communications Officer at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. As part of his daily duties, he oversees media relations and outreach for two of the department's regulatory divisions, focuses on social media engagement, and supports the work of the Commissioner's Office.

It was Allen's involvement in the 2015 High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or "bird flu" outbreak that sparked his interest in internal crisis communications. The HPAI outbreak was the largest animal disease outbreak in U.S. history. Minnesota was hit especially hard. Over 9 million birds died or were euthanized, and the outbreak resulted in a \$650 million economic loss to Minnesota. As one of the lead state agencies responding to the crisis, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's efforts lasted five months. Allen worked on internal and external communications as part of the state's incident command team. It was during this time he became fascinated by crisis communications efforts, especially messaging to employees as the crisis unfolded and continued.

Prior to his work in government, Allen spent eight years as a journalist at television stations in Minnesota and South Dakota. He has a bachelor's degree in speech communication from Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Minnesota.

Executive Summary

Crises can take many forms. However, there is a commonality: each crisis destabilizes an organization and requires a rapid response. Communications plays an important role in minimizing or solving crisis events. While extensive research has been conducted on external crisis communications, there have been few studies on internal crisis communications. This research project aims to fill in the gap by examining how and when communicators should engage employees during a crisis, and by studying how trust factors into internal message development.

To research these issues, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted in June 2017 with professionals leading communications efforts in organizations or providing guidance to communicators through public relations agencies. Ten of the organizations and agencies are located in Minnesota. The other is located in Iowa. All interviewees have faced crises in their careers. The group addresses internal audiences ranging in size from 80 to over 125,000 people.

The results of this research project show that organizations should:

- Communicate to staff before, during, and after a crisis on a regular basis to ensure employees are well informed;
- Strive to conduct face-to-face communication when addressing internal audiences; and,
- Build messages with trust in mind so that employees believe the communication and remain loyal to the organization.

There are several limitations and suggestions for future research based on this research project. Because expert interviews are quantitative in nature, the results cannot be generalized. A follow-up survey with a larger sample would eliminate this issue. Further research could also

examine communication differences or considerations within work sectors, industries, or organization sizes. Finally, a survey of employees would remedy limitations raised by interviewees self-reporting employee trust in crisis messaging.

Based on the results of this project, there are 10 recommended best practices communicators should be mindful of for successful internal crisis communications.

1. Always communicate to employees first.
2. Have an internal sounding board for your ideas and messages.
3. Create a schedule for consistent internal communication updates and keep to it.
4. Construct internal messages that reflect the organization's values.
5. Build messages that are consistent among internal and external audiences.
6. Take time to think through messages to staff. Do not be impulsive in your communications.
7. Communicate face-to-face with employees during a crisis, no matter the size of the organization.
8. Provide opportunities for employee dialogue.
9. Remember to communicate to employees postcrisis. This time is critical.
10. Learn about your internal audience. It will ensure communication is effective.

Introduction

Crises are inevitable situations organizations face. From product recalls to embezzlement, and natural disasters to consumer boycotts, crises take many forms. However, definitions vary widely on what constitutes a crisis. While some literature explains a crisis as any threat to an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Allen & Caillouet, 1994), other research quantifies a crisis by harm or damage caused to an organization (Pierson & Mitroff, 1993; Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). Heide and Simonsson's (2014) definition is broad enough to encompass a variety of situations while adding an action an organization must carry out. The researchers view a crisis occurring when "the normal order in a system is destabilized, which creates considerable uncertainty and requires rapid response" (p. 130). With this view of a crisis, organizations must act on a multitude of challenges which can disrupt business and put the company in a perilous situation.

Communications plays an important role during a crisis. A wealth of research exists on crisis communications and organizations' use of external communications during a crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2014; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016). Research suggests that communicators have an opportunity to minimize the impact of a crisis. This impact is reflected in stock prices, sales, or reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2011).

Until a decade ago, however, little had been studied on organization's internal communications during a crisis. One thing is clear, though: research has shown external crisis communication strategies and techniques should not be directly applied to internal crisis communications because internal audiences are closer to the crisis and can be both senders and receivers of messages (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen,

2012; Heide & Simonsson, 2015). Communicators, therefore, have few resources and guidelines when informing employees during crisis situations.

The purpose of this research project is to examine crisis messaging strategies for internal audiences. When is the right time to communicate to employees about a crisis affecting the organization? What media channels are best suited to effectively communicate information to employees? This project also examines trust in internal messaging and the need for crisis communications planning. Combined, this research will provide communicators with strategies that can form a holistic approach to internal crisis communications that can minimize negative impacts to the organization.

Literature Review

The Internal Audience

It is important to begin an examination of the literature on internal crisis communications with a study of internal audiences. Before communicators can craft messages to employees in their organization, one must understand employee communication needs and motivations. These factors will help employees make sense of the communications in the context of the organization (Heide & Simonsson, 2015). It is also necessary to understand employee communication needs and motivations because, as the literature suggests, internal audiences may be the most complex group of interested parties, or stakeholders, for an organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen et al. 2012; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016), when compared to external stakeholders like customers, shareholders, and the general public. Research provides several reasons for this classification of internal audiences including audience investment and message influence.

The literature states that employees are more invested, both emotionally and financially, in an organization and may belong to more than one stakeholder group (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Heide & Simsonsson, 2014). This investment level can vary widely. In the strictest sense, members of the organization benefit financially (because of compensation received for work performed) or emotionally (because of relationships within the work setting). More broadly, employees may achieve financial and non-monetary gain because they are also shareholders or customers of the company. Each of these scenarios is tied to various levels of investment. Depending on the role in which employees view themselves at a given moment, there may be a varying degree of saliency of internal messaging.

Furthermore, research indicates internal stakeholders are influenced by inside and outside messages. Messages intended for external stakeholders can and will filter into the organization (Mazzei, 2010). In today's society filled with various communication channels and media, boundaries between internal and external communications are easily broken down. Employees are influenced by external communications through traditional and social media, and internal communications can quickly be shared outside the company through a forwarded email. Therefore, communicators must be mindful that external messages will have an impact on internal audiences, and must strike a balance between what is being messaged externally and internally.

With this examination, evidence points to internal stakeholders as a dynamic audience who should be the focus of communications. Employees are valuable to the overall work of the organization, and engaging them through communications can help the overall mission and

function of the company (Mazzei, 2010; Mazzei, 2014). However, communicators must also be mindful of employee needs and motivations. Because employees have differing needs and motivations that can change over time, communications must adapt to these changes in the moment.

The Need for Internal Crisis Communication

To further understand why communications needs to be specially tailored to internal audiences, it is necessary to approach internal communications through the lens of a crisis. Studies consistently show that external crisis communications principles and theories should not be directly applied to internal audiences during a crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen et al., 2012; Heide & Simonsson, 2015).

Research states employees should be addressed differently through other communication strategies in times of a crisis because employees are closer to the crisis event and organization than external audiences (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Heide & Simonsson, 2015). This “closeness” is characterized through the connection and involvement employees have with the organization. External communication practices don’t adequately address this issue.

The literature goes on to explain that internal stakeholders are comprised of both senders (managers) and receivers (employees), but should also be viewed in the reverse (Johansen et al., 2012). This can be viewed as a two-way communications approach where messages travel back and forth amongst organizational levels. Therefore, employees are seen as active participants in organizational communication, rather than merely passive recipients of information like other potential stakeholders. This complexity requires various strategies when

conveying information and interacting with employees, issues not covered by external communication.

Research does, however, examine a public relations theory often directed at an external audience that can be applied internally (Mazzei, 2010; Mazzei, 2014). Grunig's 1968 Situational Theory of Publics examines various attitudes people have toward communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The publics, or stakeholders, can process information in two ways. Publics can passively process information they receive. Or, they can actively seek out, interpret, and spread information and then take action. Active or passive behaviors depend on the level of awareness about a situation, or in this context, awareness of the crisis. The behavior also depends on the perceived obstacles that stand in the way of fixing the situation and the level of involvement in the situation (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Since 1968, the Situational Theory of Publics has been tested, expanded, and refined. Recent research has helped communicators identify and interact with strategic publics, or groups of individuals, in and around the organization (Kim & Grunig, 2011). This can be directly applied to internal audiences, like active employees engaged in interpersonal, horizontal, and cross-functional communication. Interpersonal communication refers to messages between two people. Horizontal communication centers on information-sharing among groups of people within the same level of the organization. Whereas, cross-functional communication takes place between various functions or departments in an organization – such as finance, human resources, and marketing. Active employees also seek information from multiple sources (Mazzei, 2010). This can be useful knowledge during a crisis and can lead to strategies that better target those active employees who are looking to remedy the situation.

Internal crisis communications must go above and beyond any external crisis planning that a communications professional undertakes. However, research is limited and there is little guidance for communicators as they try to decide when to communicate to employees and how those crisis messages should be conveyed.

A Staged Approach to Communications

Timing is critical in communications. It is even more important during a crisis because of the urgency of the situation. That is why studies within the last decade advocate for internal crisis communications through a staged approach – meaning different strategies and tactics are used before, during, and after a crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Heide & Simsonsson, 2014).

During the precrisis phase, researchers suggest communication professionals should facilitate and encourage an environment that puts crises at the forefront. Managers and frontline employees can then begin to think of crisis management as an ongoing process where risks can be identified and mitigated before the situation turns into a crisis. In the midst of the crisis, communicators should provide information and opportunity for dialog among internal audiences. It is important that communicators act as an internal counselor to formulate messages and identify individuals and groups to target with those messages. Finally, the postcrisis phase should focus on communications providing a platform to discuss the crisis, learn from it, and facilitate changes for the next crisis (Heide & Simsonsson, 2014).

There is skepticism and criticism of this staged approach. As Jaques (2007) indicates, a staged approach can lead to oversimplification of the complex problem of a crisis. This representation can therefore be misleading and does not reflect the reality of situations. With

this oversimplification comes a multitude of communication problems. For instance, potential crisis scenarios may not be properly accounted for or fully examined allowing for communication gaps to develop along the timespan of the crisis.

In order to combat this criticism, researchers acknowledge the staged approach to crisis communication is not a linear process. On the contrary, it is complex and dynamic. Overlaps and recurrences may take place between the various stages. Some research also suggests the staged approach to communication not only happens up and down the organization's structure but also horizontally. This horizontal communication takes place among manager groups and employee groups (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011).

In Figure 1 (see next page), Frandsen and Johansen (2011) illustrate this approach by breaking down each phase of the crisis (p. 355). The researchers highlight employees and management as both senders and receivers of messages across the various stages of a crisis, and the focus of the communications along the continuum. It should be noted that some organizational factors could have a positive or negative influence on this process. Those factors include cultural issues, communications strategies, and human reactions to a crisis. Other research backs up this claim of the importance of culture to crisis communications (Strandberg & Visgø, 2016; Adamu, Mohamad, & Rahman, 2016).

While this staged approach may be helpful in addressing key roles and practices of internal communications throughout the crisis, it does raise some questions. In the moment of a crisis, how do communicators balance all of the needs of internal and external audiences in a timely manner? Also, what should be done when a crisis moves from an immediate and finite

A Staged Approach to Internal Crisis Communication

	PRECRISIS STAGE	CRISIS EVENT	POSTCRISIS STAGE
Focal point	<i>To prevent To prepare</i>	<i>To handle the crisis To make sense</i>	<i>To learn To change</i>
(1) Employees as receivers	Communication of risks, issues and stakes	Communication of relevant instructions and information	Communication of new knowledge (organizational learning and memory)
Management or crisis management team as senders	Communication that strengthens the psychological crisis-preparedness	Handling of reactions to the crisis and sense making	Communication of post-crisis changes
Other types of senders outside the organization	Communication of the crisis management plan (policies and guidelines)	Protection/restoration of the trust and confidence among employees Crisis auto-communication	Discourse of renewal Memorials
	(3) Horizontal communication among managers and among employees		
(2) Employees as senders	Negative upward communication through the line (whistle blowers, dissenters)	Communication of reactions to the crisis Positive and/or negative organizational "ambassadors"	Organizational storytelling
Management or crisis management team as receivers			
Other types of receivers outside the organization			
Organizational factors having a positive or negative influence	<p>Crisis type (content, intensity, dynamics and interpretation)</p> <p>Cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to a crisis (such as anger, stress, grief, and betrayal)</p> <p>Crisis culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and error culture • Psychological defense mechanisms • Crisis perception • Crisis memory • Collective mindfulness <p>Communication culture or climate</p> <p>Communication strategy</p>		

Figure 1 Frandsen and Johansen (2011) break down a staged approach to internal crisis communications (p. 355).

event to a long-term and ongoing situation? Communicators must also balance the many tasks of a crisis while sustaining the ongoing work of the organization.

Because of the many unknowns that still exist in the current research of internal crisis communications timing, this research project will examine the following question to better understand when communicators should provide information to staff so that employees' motivations and needs are being met:

RQ1: What points during a crisis are most critical for organizations to engage in employee communication about the situation?

Communication Channels Matter

Communicating to those within the organization at the right moment is critical. Yet, it is also important that communicators convey much needed information through the appropriate channels. This channel selection was examined in the foundational work of Robert Lengel and Richard Daft in 1988 in the development of their Media Richness Theory. To this day, communicators look to this work as a guiding principle for effectively conveying messages.

Media Richness Theory explains that “each channel of communication – be it written, telephone, face-to-face, or electronic – has characteristics that make it appropriate in some situations and not in others” (Lengel & Daft, 1988, p. 225). The media, or channels, differ greatly in their capacity to convey information. Therefore, the richer the medium, the greater the ability to handle multiple information cues, such as body language, inflection, and gestures, provide quick feedback, and establish a personal focus (p. 226). For example, face-to-face meetings are the richest medium. The discussion can convey multiple cues, provide immediate feedback, and establish a personal focus. Posters and bulletins are the least rich, or rather, the leanest medium because these channels lack all three characteristics.

Media Selection Framework

		MANAGEMENT PROBLEM	
		Routine	Nonroutine
Media Richness	Rich	<p><i>Communication Failure</i></p> <p>Data glut. Rich media used for routine messages. Excess cues cause confusion and surplus meaning.</p>	<p><i>Effective Communication</i></p> <p>Communication success because rich media match nonroutine messages.</p>
	Lean	<p><i>Effective Communication</i></p> <p>Communication success because media low in richness match routine messages.</p>	<p><i>Communication Failure</i></p> <p>Data starvation. Lean media used for nonroutine messages. Too few cues to capture message complexity.</p>

Figure 2. Lengel and Daft (1988) developed a framework that examines media richness within the context of routine and nonroutine issues. Alignment either signals communication failure or success (p. 227).

Lengel and Daft (1988) provide a framework (Figure 2) that aligns the richness of the media with how routine or non-routine the communication may be in a given situation. The researchers explain that routine communications are “simple, straightforward, rational, logical and contain no surprises” (p. 226). Non-routine communications, on the other hand, “have greater potential for misunderstanding, and are often characterized by time pressure, ambiguity, and surprise” (p. 226). The correct alignment of richness with routineness will then determine if the communication is effective or a failure. Routine communication requires lean media to be effective. Using rich media in this instance would constitute a failure because the receiver of the message would be overwhelmed with cues and data. This would lead to confusion. Consequently, non-routine communications require rich media to be effective. Communication would be unsuccessful if lean media were used in a non-routine setting.

Clearly, a crisis situation is non-routine. Therefore, by Lengel and Daft's (1988) theory, communicators must use rich media to convey messages in order to be successful. Emotional appeal, eye contact, and gestures add to the often difficult messages that need to be conveyed in times of a crisis and can help ease difficult messages.

Research since the development of the Media Richness Theory, however, has pointed out that the complexities of organizations and the dynamics of crises often limit the choices of channels (Johansen et al., 2012; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2011). For example, Johansen, Aggerholm, and Frandsen (2012) found that the size of the organization played an important role in determining the choice of channel – the larger the organization, the less likely face-to-face communication was used. Their research shows, in both municipalities and private companies surveyed, emails and intranet sites were important communication channels in times of crisis, as important as face-to-face communication (special town halls and joint meetings).

Mazzei (2010) adds another layer to the communications channel discussion. The researcher argues that internal communications should no longer focus routine communication efforts merely on a message-targeting function, such as publishing an internal newsletter or organizing an annual meeting. Rather, communicators should redirect efforts that encourage active employee behaviors, including knowledge sharing and collaboration on top of message delivery, which can be beneficial in times of a crisis. This idea links back to Frandsen and Johansen's (2011) staged communication approach where messages flow up, down, and horizontally across an organization.

This recent work builds on Lengel and Daft's (1988) research and sheds light on some of the issues communicators face during a crisis. What may be the most effective communication, a rich medium like face-to-face meetings in a non-routine setting (see Figure 2), is not always possible when the crisis is changing or evolving. Because of issues on channel selection and usage, this research project seeks to examine the following question to help communicators understand the best way messages should be delivered to employees in times of a crisis:

RQ2: What communication channels targeting employees are most effective during a crisis situation?

Gaining and Maintaining Employee Trust

Employees are some of the most complex stakeholders with which an organization comes into contact. Internal audiences are critical to the success or failure of the company. That's why employee trust has been cited in numerous areas of management and organizational studies. However, how does trust factor into employee involvement during a crisis? The research is unclear whether trust could be affected by message timing or channel selections, hence the need for this project.

Trust is linked to a number of business areas, such as leadership, labor relations, and objective-based management (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Levels of trust also reflect employee loyalty and therefore influence a number of organizational issues, which can range from employee turnover to embezzlement to a successful organizational change (Perry & Mankin, 2004). All of these examples are, or have the potential to be, a crisis for an organization. High employee turnover can result in an organization that is unable to meet goals.

An embezzlement case may become front page news and lead to falling stock prices. A failed organizational change could result in lost revenue that may result in the firing of the CEO.

In order to understand the role of communications in building and maintaining employee trust in an organization, one must first look at the definition of trust. It is clear from the literature: there is not one agreed-upon definition of trust (Mayer et al., 1995; Perry & Mankin, 2004; Dietz & Hartog, 2006). This is because trust is multidimensional and researchers find it difficult to come to a consensus on what dimensions are necessary for trust (Joseph & Winston, 2005).

Researchers, however, seem to be able to pinpoint what is not trust. Dietz and Hartog (2005) are quick to dismiss the idea that trust and trustworthiness are interchangeable terms. They see trustworthiness as a quality that the trustee in a relationship has, but trusting is something the trustee does. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) also examine how trust has been confused with cooperation. They conclude that trust can lead to cooperation, but trust is not a condition for cooperation to exist because a lack of cooperation doesn't put a party at risk. Also, an employee could cooperate and even appear to act like he or she trusts another individual out of fear of retribution without trust being present. Therefore, cooperation can happen in the absence of trust and cannot be a factor of trust.

It is this risk factor that appears to be at the center of a definition upon which many can agree. Most definitions of trust focus on the idea that actions of an individual toward another who is vulnerable will be beneficial rather than detrimental. Trust in individuals takes place

when risk is involved in a situation and the risk can be mitigated by another (Perry & Mankin, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995).

When researchers try to measure trust, they return to multidimensional factors. Perry and Mankin (2004) use the characteristics of integrity, professionalism, motives, and fairness to determine the level of trust. This measurement is similar to the scale used by Dietz and Hartog (2006), in which they measure integrity, truthfulness, intentions, fairness, and openness. Again, the variations support the premise that consensus has not been reached on a common definition of trust.

Beyond definitions, the literature examines trust in various members of an organization. Specifically, employees assign varying degrees of trust to different levels of management, such as direct managers or CEOs (Perry & Mankin, 2004; Joseph & Winston, 2005). The literature shows that more trust is given to immediate supervisors than to the CEO. Perry and Mankin (2004) explain why this may happen: direct supervisors gain more trust because they are “closer” to employees than higher-level management, meaning the supervisor interacts with the employees daily and directly. Also, the direct supervisor tends to be a longer-term boss (p. 281). This suggests that tenure matters to employees when formulating a trust relationship.

This “closeness” with employees and supervisors is explained by George Graen’s 1976 Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen, 1976; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The theory suggests that “superiors develop in-group relationships with some subordinates and out-group relationships with others” (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011, p. 154). The in-group relationships are based on mutual trust, respect and support. The communication between the

superior and subordinate is informal and disagreements can happen without harming the relationship. On the other hand, out-group relationships center on low trust between the superior and subordinate, and communication is often avoided or limited to task-related matters. These relationships and types of formal and informal communication examined in the LMX Theory point to the link between communications and degrees of trust. This also points to a possible link between face-to-face messaging and trust, which Lengel and Daft's (1988) research shows is needed for effective communication during non-routine times, such as a crisis. If in-person communication happens during a crisis, it may mean in-group relationships built on trust exist in the organization.

Missing from the literature, however, is an examination of outside factors, like a crisis, that play into trust (Dietz & Hartog, 2006). External cues could constrain trustee behavior and therefore limit development of trust. With limited research on this matter, it is difficult to determine what or how many cues come into play when trust is formed. Nevertheless, trust is an important factor that managers and organizations need to focus on when developing and conveying messages to employees, especially in times of a crisis. But are communicators concerned about trust during a crisis? Or, are they so focused on the crisis at hand that trust is taken for granted? This research project examines how trust factors into internal crisis communications development with the following question:

RQ3: How should communicators factor in trust when developing internal crisis messaging?

Method

This research project utilizes qualitative interviews to better understand how communicators approach crisis situations and communicate to internal audiences. Eleven professionals were contacted to participate in interviews. The interviewees were found through business and school connections. Of the 11 interviewees, 10 are based in Minnesota. The eleventh is located in Iowa. There is a near even split in the gender of the interviewees: six males and five females.

Eight of the interviewees are communicators working in public, private, or non-profit sector organizations. There is representation from several industries, including agriculture, healthcare, and retail. There is a mixture of different titles among the eight (e.g. chief communications officer, assistant vice president of communications, director of communications, and communications supervisor). Each interviewee has faced one or more crises in which he or she has needed to respond through internal and external communications. The interviewees lead either communications efforts or internal communications within their organizations. There is also a wide representation of sizes of organizations in the interview group. The interviewees address internal audiences ranging from 80 to over 125,000 people.

The other three interviewees are communications strategists for public relations firms. They advise a variety of clients on communications issues, including internal crisis communications. Their clients come from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The clients also represent a variety of industries, from healthcare to manufacturing and from education to agriculture.

The interviews were conducted in June 2017. Each lasted approximately one hour. Six of the interviews were in-person, and the other five were conducted over the phone. The interviews were based on a semi-structured set of interview questions (see Appendix 1). The questions focused on several themes:

- crises faced by organizations;
- precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis internal communication efforts;
- channel selection for employee communication during and outside of crises;
- employee trust in crisis messaging; and,
- crisis communications planning.

Transcripts of the interviews (see Appendix 2) have been stripped of any identifiable names to provide the interviewees with anonymity. This allowed for the communicators to speak freely about the crisis, crisis response, and communications planning in their organizations. The transcripts were then analyzed for patterns and themes. The findings and examination of the research questions provide the basis for the research project's internal crisis communications recommendations.

Research Findings

The findings of this research project begin with an examination of the variety of crises organizations face. The discussion shifts to when communicators choose to engage their internal audiences during the crisis, and how communicators share their messages with employees. Employee trust in internal crisis messaging is examined. Crisis planning is explored, with an emphasis on how internal communications fits into those plans. Finally, the findings focus on lessons learned that may be applicable to other crises and organizations.

Crises vary but share a commonality

The term “crisis” comes with a broad definition that involves any situation which threatens an organization, leading to damage and requiring a quick response (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). The threats and organizational damage are evident in each of the situations described in the interviews. From employee misconduct to data breaches and bomb threats to downsizing, each of the situations had a major impact on the affected organization.

While some of the crises lasted for several days or weeks, many of the events lasted months. Several of the crises, including a disease outbreak, infrastructure failure, and a CEO turnover coupled with a downturn in stock values and other economic issues, lasted over a year. The communicators and other organizational staff faced great amounts of stress because of the duration and intensity of the events. As one interviewee shared, “I can't underscore this enough: there was never time to breathe for pretty much the first 15 months.” Another interviewee likened the crisis to a war where the other side was “constantly trying to get at you.”

Even though the type and duration of the crises within this research varied greatly, there was one commonality: a human cause – whether that was an error or omission, or reaction or inaction on someone's part. “It's almost anything that mankind can do... because you're dealing with people and people make mistakes. People do things and things happen,” stated one interviewee.

Even when crises, such as natural disasters, do not have a human element as a spark, the crisis could be made worse by human intervention or a lack of it. Experts point to the

government response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as an example of a crisis that was made worse by human failures (Kapucu & Van Wart, 2008).

Communications happens across the crisis

The subsequent set of questions in the interviews focused on timing of internal crisis communication. Previous research examined a phased approach to employee communications, with information sharing happening precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis. Much of the interview time was dedicated to communications across the crisis timeline and the strategies behind the timing.

When asked about precrisis communications, there were four instances where communications took place in this phase. That happened because the crises were able to be anticipated. Those crises focused on employment issues: a workers' strike, a work shutdown, layoffs, and a CEO change. There were several reasons for the precrisis communications. Generally, however, the strategy focused on sharing information with employees before the crisis so staff were not caught off guard. Another strategy used precrisis communications to set up and alert employees to future communication channels during the strike and the shutdown. Finally, communications was used to rationalize future decisions. This was especially true in the layoff scenario.

Other interviewees believed their organizations effectively communicated during the precrisis stage even though the communicators were not able to anticipate the crisis events. In those circumstances, communication strategies focused on relationship-building, making person-to-person connections that could then be used during a crisis, and issues management, examining situations that have the potential to become crises.

“We've really focused on building those relationships deep within our respective teams so that if something is bubbling, and maybe hasn't become crisis yet but could be, we have a clear line of sight on that. And we're actually jumping in to help them think it through, anticipate what would be the tipping point to a crisis, and prepare for it.”

These strategies were viewed as prevention and preparation, as Frandsen and Johansen (2011) refer to in their staged approach (see Figure 1).

Most of the communication in the interviewees' organizations was focused on the crisis phase. All crises had some level of internal communication. However, several interviewees felt they could have done more to communicate to staff. As one said, “We want to make sure that they [the employees] are armed and prepared, and good message carriers to their particular audiences.” Those who believed they should have done more felt they could have provided more information and done so more frequently.

Interviewees listed numerous strategies for their communications during the crisis phase. Several said transparency was the most important reason for communication to staff.

“...One of our norms is to try to be as transparent in our communications as possible, and I think there are a lot of good reasons for that. One of which is, in the case of labor negotiations, it's important for us to try to be as clear to the employees who are represented by the union as possible as to what [NAME OF COMPANY]'s position in the negotiations is.”

Others listed candor and consistency as important strategies. Consistency involved a common message internally and externally and regular timing of messages. “It shouldn’t be spotty or hit or miss. It should be either on a predictable timeline or... reliably regular,” said an interviewee. Regularly scheduled messages were especially important in a sustained crisis that lasted weeks or months.

According to interviewees, timing of the first messages during the crisis was critical. While urgency was key, two interviewees noted that taking some time, even if it was several minutes, to collect thoughts and formulate a plan was necessary. Another respondent felt internal communications should have preceded any external communications instead of coinciding simultaneously. Those that expressed concern over timing of their communication to staff felt the issue had resulted after attorneys became involved in crisis discussions. The attorneys’ concern over legal issues resulted in communication that lagged the situation.

Several interviewees stated that internal communications during the crisis phase was not simply about pushing out information to employees. They felt a dialog with staff was important to gauge the effectiveness of the internal communications and to ease any fears and anxiety. As one respondent said, “... people like to be heard. They don’t just like to be talked to.”

Nine out of the 11 communicators did some type of postcrisis communication. One interviewee explained the need for postcrisis communication, and why it was just as important as communications during the crisis.

“It takes longer for them [the employees] to catch on to the severity of the crisis. So they start worrying after external constituencies start worrying, and they continue worrying after external constituencies have stopped worrying.”

Because of this lag time, several of the interviewees believed organizations should not stop communicating to employees simply because the media spotlight faded. However, interviewees did not agree on specific indicators that may signal when a crisis has ended and postcrisis messaging should begin. When asked how a communicator can know when a crisis is over, one interviewee stated, “It’s not a simple checklist. And that’s what everybody wants.” Two of the interviewees referred to a “gut feeling” that communicators need to act on to determine the appropriate time to move to the postcrisis phase.

Numerous reasons were given for the need for postcrisis communications. Several interviewees stated the communications in this phase was an opportunity to learn what was done right or what could be improved for the next crisis. Others listed strategies that were specific to the crisis. After a labor strike, one organization used postcrisis communications to set the stage for healing and rebuilding relationships damaged during the contract negotiations breakdown. Another organization used postcrisis communications to follow through on promises made during a crime spree. Communications helped bring resolution to the situation.

Face-to-face communications remains the goal

A variety of communication channels were utilized in the precrisis, crisis, and postcrisis phases. Those channels included in-person meetings or discussions, email, social media, internal websites, printed and electronic newsletters, and external media. However, the use of external media was controversial among some of the interviewees. While one participant

suggested media could influence internal audiences, others felt this was a dangerous practice that highlighted a poor organizational culture. “I would say the internal system [culture] is pretty broken if that's what you need to do,” stated an interviewee who felt that external communications should not be called on to carry out messages to an internal audience.

Organizational size or crisis type did not dictate communication channel usage. However, face-to-face communication, regardless of the size of the organization or type of crisis, was seen by all communicators as critical to message delivery. While this communication channel may be difficult to execute for large organizations or organizations with multiple locations, interviewees believed an effort should be made to conduct face-to-face communication. Many of the interviewees in large organizations said this could be accomplished through planning and holding multiple meetings specific to work sites and labor shifts.

A multilayered approach to internal communications was also common among all crises discussed in the interviews. There was no reliance on only one channel. As an interviewee explained, “The general principle is that people don't hear or understand the first, second, or even third time you tell them. You got to keep going. The more venues you can do, the better.” At least two channels were used in each crisis. In numerous instances, four to five channels were used.

In two crises, new communication channels were created specifically for the situation. During a labor strike and a work shutdown, communication channels that were normally used by the organizations, such as email and internal websites, were not available to employees.

Therefore, communicators had to plan ahead and develop new channels. Those included a hotline for employees to call, an outward facing website that could be accessed by staff outside of the organization, and an email list of employees' private email addresses.

Trust is multifaceted

When asked about trust of internal crisis communications, all recognized the need for trust in messaging. Most of the interviewees believed their messages were trusted by staff. One said, "Not at all," however, the interviewee believed that trust has improved. When asked why they believed this, the respondent stated there had recently been an improvement in employees' trust of communications because of a new CEO and a shift to a more conversational message tone. "It's like you're sitting across from him," the respondent said of the new CEO. "That's how he communicates."

Interviewees said tone and messenger were two of many factors that influenced trust. Several noted that trust depended on who was conveying the message. Four interviewees suggested the CEO or head of the organization should always be the messenger in any crisis because he or she was a trusted leader. Two participants said employees trust their immediate supervisor or manager; therefore, organizations pass messages down to supervisors so they can share information with employees and field questions. Two interviewees stated that communicators must gauge the crisis to determine if the CEO or leader should speak immediately or if the task could be delegated to some other leader further down in the organization. If the crisis were to escalate, the CEO would then need to step in to share information. There were no specifics given to indicate when this transfer should take place.

Respondents noted several other trust factors in message construction. They stated:

- There should be consistency in messages. Internal and external messages need to be aligned. This also includes consistency between what the organization says and the actions it takes.
- Candor and transparency are critical. Too often leaders are hesitant to admit when they do not know something.
- The tone of the message carries weight. It needs to have a human element and cannot seem like a canned response.

Several interviewees believed that message timing can build or erode trust. “If you're the last one to know and if it's something intimately important to you, you feel betrayed,” said one interviewee. “Think about your own personal life. If you have a family situation, you want to hear from your family.” Therefore, the interviewee felt an organization must do everything it can to share information with employees before the public is aware of the crisis.

Finally, two interviewees stated that trust between leadership and staff is a long and ongoing process. In order for employees to trust the crisis communications coming from the organization, trust must be built before a crisis ever occurs. That trust can then be utilized when it is needed the most.

Crisis planning prepares for the worst

On the topic of crisis planning, all of the interviewees did some form of planning. As one interviewee stated, planning is necessary for safeguarding an organization from any number of crises. “It's like an insurance policy. You know, you would never own a home or have an

apartment without insurance.” However, the amount of planning varied greatly from organization to organization.

At one end of the spectrum, one organization follows up to 50 issues each year that could become crises. Their plans call on preparing for the worst case scenario. This includes a crisis operating structure with multiple teams of people heading up specific areas such as media relations, consumer communications, science and technology, and resource allocations. Any crisis the organization encounters is then scaled using the plan. Some crises require a greater response than others. Along with a scalable plan, this organization has drafted approximately 100 sets of talking points on a variety of issues.

On the other end of the spectrum, one organization stated they did not have a lot of crisis plans. They noted there are several plans for specific issues the organization faces on an annual basis which they view as a crises. However, this organization’s situation may be unique. As a government agency, any large-scale crisis would garner a collective government response rather than an agency-by-agency effort.

Many of the interviewees relied on business continuity planning or standard operating procedures as part or all of their crisis planning. No matter the crisis, these plans ensure that business functions continue. For instance, a manufacturer could continue operating despite a fire at one location, or a hospital would continue caring for patients during a flood. A formula is followed in this type of crisis planning. “It’s just going through the basic steps to ensure that the recipe that is being executed... is doing what it’s supposed to,” said one interviewee.

Communications, and specifically internal communications, is one component of this planning process.

Several of the interviewees noted that planning must center on structure rather than people, meaning set roles are based on positions and titles. For instance, in a crisis, social media would be monitored by the social media manager instead of a general employee. This ensures the roles are filled with people who have the right knowledge to manage the crisis. Planning for structure also allows for clearly defined decision-making roles.

“I think in the urgency sorts of responses, it's very hierarchical. There is someone in charge and everyone in the room knows that person is in charge, and you're funneling information to that person. And then you're leading the tactics that they say. Because that's the most efficient way to do it.”

This structured approach also allows for a scalable response to crises.

There was mutual agreement among respondents that crisis planning is an ongoing process which should be evaluated on a frequent timeframe. Four interviewees do this on a yearly basis. One interviewee, however, felt daily tasks consume much of their work which leaves little or no time for crisis planning. The respondent admitted this was not ideal and acknowledged more time should be devoted to planning.

Crises provide learning opportunities

The final questions in the interview asked participants to share any lessons learned from crises or reflect on items they would have done differently in previous crises. The list of

opinions was long and varied. Of those not already covered in this paper, interviewees shared the following lessons:

- Internal communications is much more unpredictable than external communications. Reporters will always be looking for similar information. However, the internal audience will vary greatly because of differences in expectations and company culture.
- Do not deal with a crisis remotely. It is always important to send someone to the crisis to get accurate, first-hand accounts and provide direct communication and support.
- Listen more than you speak. In internal communications, it is important to understand your audience. That can only be accomplished by listening to staff and hearing their concerns and issues.
- Push back against legal. Lawyers will advise for as little communication as possible. However, it is important to share information and be transparent, though this may be easier said than done. There can be consequences to ignoring the legal advice, and that should be taken into consideration when formulating strategy and messages. The bottom line: it is important for communicators to express the need to share as much information as soon as possible for the benefit of employees and the company.
- Take the time to acknowledge there is a problem and that employees may be frightened. This will create a human connection with staff and build trust.
- Proactive internal crisis communications does not necessarily mean you break the story. Sometimes being proactive means you are ready to act and respond.

Discussion

Internal communications is critical to an organization, especially during a crisis. One interviewee likened the importance of internal communications to the foundation of a building. “If you don't build a good foundation, everything else you build is going to fall down. And your internal communications is building the foundation for your organization.” However, little research has been conducted on effective ways to carry out this communication. When and how should communicators engage internal audiences during a crisis, and does trust factor into message development? This research project shows that organizations should communicate to staff before, during, and after a crisis on a regular basis to ensure employees are well informed. Also, every communicator should strive for face-to-face communication with internal audiences. Finally, communicators should be mindful of trust when building messages. This will ensure that employees believe what is being said and remain loyal to the organization. This section expands on these results.

RQ1: What points during a crisis are most critical for organizations to engage in employee communication about the situation?

When examining timing of messages across the crisis, Frandsen and Johansen (2011) argue in their staged approach model (see Figure 1) that communications are necessary precrisis, in the midst of the crisis, and postcrisis. While not all interviewees communicated internally during each of the three stages, it is evident all recognized the importance of communicating across the crisis. In every situation, there was intent to prepare for or prevent a crisis – a focal point of the precrisis phase. Communicators certainly shared information with employees during the crisis. There was also an effort made to learn or make changes postcrisis.

Many felt communicating before, during, and after a crisis was a goal organizations should strive to achieve. Communicators who felt they effectively handled crises were well prepared, communicated often, and conducted follow-up conversations to ensure lessons were learned and employees had closure on the event. Therefore, organizations should communicate during all points across a crisis.

This consistent communication across the crisis is backed by Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Employees have a high level of awareness about the crisis because of their "closeness" to the situation. So according to the theory, the employees are active publics. They need information to interpret what is happening and take appropriate action. By communicating precrisis, during the crisis, and post crisis, communicators do the organization a favor by engaging and creating active publics. The employees then feel they are beneficial participants in the crisis and its solution.

Regular messaging to staff is the key to ensuring that communications are properly carried out in all phases of a crisis and employees remain engaged. Crisis plans must be made, updated frequently, and then shared with staff so expectations are understood. During the crisis, communications should happen on a regular schedule.

"I've become more of a believer that what you should do is have a consistent communication process rather than every so often. I mean, depending on the crisis it could be every day, every couple of days. But you should put something out on that periodic basis at the same time.... Put out a note to all the employees that says what you know, even if you don't know anything. Just so they know that someone's thinking about them and that they can stay tuned to this channel and they'll hear something."

Communication should then take place postcrisis to ensure any follow-up information is conveyed, the crisis response is assessed, and closure has been brought to the situation.

Communicators should not be fearful of over communicating to staff throughout the crisis. As one interviewee noted, the internal audience will tell you if there is too much communication taking place. Communication can then be scaled back at that point.

One issue that arose during the interviews centered on moving through the crisis phases. How do you know when the crisis is over and it is time to move to the postcrisis phase? Several interviewees admitted this is a difficult question to answer, and there is no clear solution. A list of indicators signaling an end to the crisis does not exist. However, communicators should be mindful of this issue. If organizations move to the postcrisis phase too soon, the crisis may be unnecessarily extended or a new crisis may be created.

Communicators should also be mindful of the speed in which they react and communicate through the crisis. By its nature, a crisis is often a quickly evolving event that requires a swift reaction. Fast action can mitigate or slow the crisis. However, it is also

necessary for communicators to take time as the crisis unfolds to assess the situation and determine the appropriate strategy and response. While this timing may seem contradictory to the urgency of the crisis, communicators must not be too impulsive. There may not be a specific amount of time communicators should take to prepare and respond to an unfolding crisis; however, reacting without forethought or proper information can exacerbate the situation.

RQ2: What communication channels targeting employees are most effective during a crisis situation?

As organizations decide which communication channels to use during a crisis, this research shows that every effort should be made to conduct face-to-face communication. Despite Johansen, Aggerholm, and Frandsen's (2012) finding that the larger the organization, the less likely face-to-face communication was used, this research shows that nearly every organization, no matter the size, attempts to share information this way. In fact, the larger organizations in this research project felt strongly that face-to-face communication was vital for sharing information and determining how employees were reacting to the crisis.

This falls in line with Lengel and Daft's Media Richness Theory (1988). The researchers believe that non-routine messages, which encompass communications during a crisis, need a rich medium, such as face-to-face communication. This communication channel ensures multiple information cues are conveyed, quick feedback is given and personal focus is established. Communication can be successful during the crisis because the medium matches the messages, and further emphasizes the need for face-to-face communication no matter the organization.

There are several ways large organizations can effectively carry out this face-to-face communication. First, when an organization has multiple locations, the senior-most member of the organization at a particular location should directly share information with employees. For instance, a CEO may host a town hall meeting for employees at company headquarters. Managers at locations outside of headquarters can also host meetings at their respective locations to share information. There also may be a need for multiple meetings at one location to coincide with the beginning or end of work shifts. Second, a cascading effect can be used to share messages in large organizations. The organization's leader may share information with his or her direct reports. Those employees would then share information with those they oversee, and so on.

The cascading message effect is backed by Graen's Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen, 1976; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Employees who are part of in-group relationships with their supervisors prefer to receive information through an informal dialog. This face-to-face communication can help ease tensions and calm fears. Those in the out-group want electronic and other formal communications. However, this research project shows that organizations have found most employees like this type of communication channel regardless if the employee is part of the in-group or out-group. There may be no harm, therefore, in face-to-face communication in any setting.

Face-to-face communication, however, should not be the only communication channel used during a crisis. It is important to utilize multiple channels to reach the most employees and reinforce messages in several ways. Also, organizations should survey employees on their communication needs as part of regular business assessments to better understand how

employees like to receive internal messages. In times of crisis, an organization can then reach employees by the channels with which they feel most comfortable.

RQ3: How should communicators factor in trust when developing internal crisis messaging?

While it is evident communicators recognize trust as a component of internal crisis communications, there is still uncertainty in how best to accomplish this task. To ensure employees trust messages from the organization, communicators should build internal communications with several factors in mind. First, the messenger must be well respected and in a position of authority to carry the message. Second, if the CEO or head of the organization is delivering information during a crisis, information should also be provided to supervisors and other managers to back up initial messages and provide more detail and context for staff. As Perry and Mankin (2004) note in their research, employees often feel “close” to and trust their direct supervisor more than upper management. This relationship should be utilized in a crisis. Third, communicators can also use influencers, those employees who may not be in a management role but are looked to by other employees for guidance and information, to help share information throughout the organization.

Finally, transparency, consistency, and honesty should be the center of all internal crisis communications. These factors closely link to previous research on trust (Perry & Mankin, 2004; Dietz & Hartog, 2006). With trustworthy messages, employees will follow an organization’s lead through the crisis. However, poor messaging will erode employee trust more than the crisis itself. “You know people are fairly understanding that bad things can happen. And where trust

gets eroded is not because the bad thing happened, it was because how you responded to it,” stated one interviewee. Communicators must ask leaders and themselves, “Will our staff trust what we’re saying?” If communication is to be effective during the crisis, the answer should be, “Yes.”

Limitations and Future Research

Because of the nature of qualitative interviews, there are limitations to this research project. While the interviews are helpful in gaining a depth of understanding of the topic, the qualitative nature of the research method limits the ability of any findings to be applied generally across a wide audience. In order to address this issue, future research would need to utilize quantitative methods, such as a survey, to build a large enough study sample to apply findings more broadly.

A nationwide study may also eliminate any regional factors that may be underlying in this research. Since all of the interview subjects are communicators within organizations based in the upper Midwest of the United States, regional cultural factors may influence the findings of this study. “Regional differences in social behavior and attitudes” can play out in communication style and timing, according to Andersen, Lustig and Andersen (1987, p. 134). A nationwide cross-section of organizations could eliminate any possibility of regional cultural communication influences affecting the outcomes.

While in-depth interviews are helpful for gaining insight into a crisis, this research method is heavily reliant on self-reporting. This may skew findings within this research project. Future studies could be conducted to corroborate these findings. For instance, a content

analysis of internal crisis communications within the interviewees' organizations would validate issues such as message timing, tone, strategies, and channels. A case study, following an organization through a crisis, could also be beneficial for future research and eliminate issues with self-reporting.

The type and size of organizations may also provide opportunities for future research. Communicators in this research project represent a wide range of industries. While this approach can provide a beneficial, general look at internal crisis communications, there may be challenges and opportunities that are industry-specific. For instance, in Heide and Simonsson's (2014) research of internal crisis communications in a hospital, the researchers conclude the healthcare setting is, "in many ways, a very specific organisation in that it works in a risky environment and almost daily enters into situations that can turn into a crisis" (p. 134). This finding is echoed by one of the interviewees:

"Working in healthcare there is sort of a wide variety of bad things that can happen, particularly in and outside of our hospitals. I mean, you think about what a hospital is and its function and who goes there, and it sort of is like a microcosm of society. Right? Here's all kinds of people. They're in all kinds of stressful situations."

Future research could focus on communications within one of the industries, such as healthcare, or compare and contrast two or more industries. If communications variations are possible from industry to industry, could there also be variations among different work sectors?

Future research could examine the public, private, and non-profit sectors, and compare or contrast the communications practices and challenges in each.

As with variations in sector and industry, organizational size may need to be studied as a variable. Participants in this research project represent organizations with fewer than 100 to over 100,000 employees. This large range may not reveal internal crisis communication challenges that are specific to a certain size organization. One interviewee has witnessed differences in communication approaches:

“One of the most important things you can do in a crisis is not take it personally. So, typically the smaller more grassroots organizations are a little bit more emotional. But once you get them moving, you can move quickly. Where the multinationals sometimes... It's incredibly slow to get them to understand the significance or the magnitude of the crisis itself.”

Future research could compare and contrast internal crisis communications in similar sized organizations to determine if best practices are specific to small, medium, or large organizations.

Finally, a limitation of this research project centers on the trust component of messages. While not all of the interviewees agreed that employees trusted the communications from the organization, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of these statements because of the self-reporting in these interviews. It would be best to survey employees to gauge trust in the internal crisis communication efforts. Future research could also survey employees' trust in

their organization before and after a crisis to determine if communications has an impact on their level of trust.

Internal Crisis Communications Recommendations

Internal communications is critical if organizations are to successfully navigate a crisis.

Done correctly, communications will ensure employees become advocates for the organization and help the company recover from the crisis. However, this is a difficult task. Employees may be the most critical audience an organization faces in a crisis. The following are 10 internal communications best practices communicators should keep in mind when faced with a crisis.

1. **Employees come first.** During a crisis, think of your audiences as ripples in a pond when a stone is cast into the water. Employees are the first ring created by the stone. They are the closest to the organization and the crisis event. Therefore, your internal audience should be the first communications priority. From there, communications moves out to the subsequent rings of customers, communities or partners, and then media.
2. **Have a sounding board for your ideas and messages.** Do you truly know if your messages will resonate with employees? You may have a gut feeling, but instincts are not always correct. Find confidants or allies within the organization and bring them in to test messages, especially at the onset of the crisis. Think of it as market research. They may have insights or ideas you never considered.
3. **Over communicating is not a bad thing.** Rarely will staff say they receive too much information from leadership, especially in a crisis. Set up a regular schedule for updates and stick to it. Maybe it is every day at 10:00 a.m. or every Wednesday afternoon. Is there nothing new to share at the scheduled time? Tell employees that. Predictable

communication will help build trust and ease fears. Staff can continue with their jobs knowing when the next update will come instead of sitting and wondering when and if the company will share information with them again. If you are hearing from staff that they are being inundated with messages, evaluate the schedule. Adjustments can be made if they are needed.

4. **Speak your values.** The tone and tenor of your messages needs to match the values that your organization posts on the website, hangs in the conference room, or lives on a daily basis. A contradiction between what you say and what you do only leads to confusion and mistrust, and that will make the situation worse.
5. **Message consistency is key.** Whatever is being said externally should also be said internally. If messages are not consistent across all audiences, your credibility and trust will take a hit. Also, you never know when those internal messages might leak out, but you do know all external communications will be heard by employees. Messages with similar information and sentiment will ensure you are not fanning the flames of the crisis.
6. **Do not be impulsive.** A sense of urgency is part of the nature of a crisis, especially as it is unfolding. Reporters are calling, employees are asking for information, and a social media firestorm has erupted. However, it is important to take a step back, even if it is five minutes, and examine your communications plan and decide what employees need to know first. Impulse can lead to missteps and mistakes along the way, and you may even make the crisis worse than it already is.

7. **Face-to-face is and always will be the best way to communicate to employees during a crisis.** No matter the size of the organization, every effort should be made to communicate face-to-face with staff, even if that means live video conferencing. Seeing and hearing from leadership can ease stress, allay fears, and build trust. Information should also be provided to managers so employees can then have conversations with their direct supervisor. Any face-to-face communication should be followed with written correspondence reiterating your messages.
8. **Have a dialogue, not a monologue.** Internal crisis messaging should not be a one-way communication channel. There should always be an opportunity for employees to ask questions, provide feedback, and share insights. Not only does two-way communication help staff as they work through the crisis, it helps communicators fine tune or change messaging as the crisis unfolds.
9. **Internal communications should not stop when the crisis disappears from the front page of the newspaper.** It is critical to have follow-up communication to employees. As mentioned, crises can be stressful and emotionally challenging events. Tell employees you appreciate them for weathering the crisis. Provide after-action items if promises were made during the crisis. Be sure to evaluate the situation post-crisis and ask for feedback. Then share that feedback with employees so they know they have been heard and understood.
10. **Get out of the office.** How do you know what your employees need to hear during a crisis if you are holed up in your office? Maybe they have concerns you are not aware of or have information you do not know about. The only way to learn about your audience

is to talk to them. Find out what your employees are hearing or saying. It is always good advice to listen more than you speak, whether you are facing a crisis or not.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Questionnaire

1. What are some of the crises your organization has faced or crises that you have dealt with in your career?
2. Was there a pre-crisis phase, and was any communication taking place during that time?
3. What internal communications was taking place during the crisis, and what were the strategies for the communications? What were some of the challenges?
4. What communication channels were used during the crisis?
5. What channels are used for routine internal communications?
6. Was face-to-face-communication used during the crisis? Do you routinely use face-to-face communication as a channel within your organization?
7. Who was involved in the crisis communications planning and execution?
8. How long was the organization dealing with the crisis?
9. Do you feel the internal communications during the crisis was effective?
10. Do you believe the employees trusted what the organization was telling them during the crisis?
11. How do you ensure that employees trust the internal messages coming from the organization?
12. Do you believe your internal audience felt like they got enough or the right kind of information in the crisis?
13. How much of the communication work during the crisis was focused on internal versus external communications?
14. Were there issues that showed up externally that you then had to respond to internally?

15. Was there a time where your messaging was different for various internal audiences?

Or, did your messaging look different internally versus externally?

16. Would you recommend using external media to reach your internal audience?

17. Is there anything you would have done differently during the crisis from an internal communications perspective?

18. Was there any communication done post-crisis? If so, what was it, and what was the strategy behind the communication?

19. How do/did you know when the crisis is over?

20. What does the organization do for crisis communication planning?

21. What are some lessons that you've learned during a crisis that could help others?

22. Is there anything else you'd like to add regarding this topic?

Appendix 2 – Interview Transcript

Question 1: What are some of the crises your organization has faced or crises that you have dealt with in your career?	
Respondent 1:	<p>So there's... actually working in health care there is sort of a wide variety of bad things that can happen, particularly in and outside of our hospitals. I mean, you think about what a hospital is and its function and who goes there, and it sort of is like a microcosm of society. Right? Here's all kinds of people. They're in all kinds of stressful situations. And so we've had, you know, anything from assaults to, you know, other sorts of physical altercations inside the hospital... might be one. I mean, we've had situations where privacy breach... might be another one. We've had a couple of... where health data is inadvertently disclosed and there's a fairly regulated process in terms of how you need to respond to that. We've had a number of those.</p> <p>Of course, the big one is recent times is the strike last year where our metro area unionized hospital nurses went on strike twice for a quite a while. And that, I mean, that's one that we could probably delve into in some detail because it involved a lot of internal communications. If you think about it, in that particular case, it is a segment of our employees themselves who in a way are sort of generating the crisis. It's not a crisis that came to us from the external environment so much as it was a crisis from within. And that made it especially challenging because in a situation like that your employees can sort of retreat into camps or factions of people who support strike... people who are on strike, people who support them, and the people who don't. Which are typically the people who have to pick up the slack because the people who are on strike aren't working. So there's a lot of delicate and sensitive messaging that needs to be... that needs to happen a situation like that to make sure that you're not sort of making the problem worse while at the same time recognizing that you're dealing with a very sort of emotionally fraught situation.</p> <p>So, you are going back to the types of crises we have, there is certainly... that a labor crisis is one particular one. Privacy breaches, you know medical errors could be, you know, things that unfortunately happen from time to time that you have to deal with. So there's all kinds.</p>
R2:	<p>Obviously the beginning of my time at [NAME OF COMPANY] was filled with, you know, CEO change. It can turn into crisis when the CEO abruptly resigns. People want to know what is going on. There is a lot of anxiety, concern. A lot to be managed.</p>

R2:	<p>So I would say a sudden CEO change, I would say a takeover bid from a founder who's bid is not agreed to by the board. I would say a rapidly declining stock price. And layoffs. We probably laid off cumulatively a thousand people during the transformation. Those are all crises.</p>
R3:	<p>We've got a whole host of crises in athletics which are a little bit different from an internal standpoint because people are interested but they're not necessarily directly impacted. So we manage those quite differently than we would say... several years ago we had kind of a rash of crime on campus. A lot of robberies. You know someone approaching a student or an individual and demanding their phone and computer and taking off. One of them even with a weapon, a gun. And that actually occurred in one of our buildings during the day.</p> <p>So I would almost categorize those three types of events as kind of a spectrum of crises. The gun incident actually initiated as an active shooter and it was probably a good 20 minutes to a half hour until we knew that it was an armed robbery of a person who has since left campus. The crime string was more of a sustained over weeks sort of thing. And I would say is a crisis that kind of started as an issue really and kind of evolved over time and got more serious. So we had to ramp up communication a little more gradually. And then the athletic stuff, you know, sexual assault and things of that sort was more of an external communication effort. And internal communication was very focused on the athletics department. It was not a widespread, community-wide message like the other two incidents were.</p>
R4:	<p>So about two years ago we had our first and only workforce reduction. In the history of the organization, it was the first time in the first time that we had to reduce the workforce. So the ultimate number of people that left we're between 45 or 50 people. That's an example of some crisis communication work we've done. So we work with partner organizations, partner donor centers. As there was an emerging outbreak of Zika in the US, it's a process that we kind of walk people through the steps that they would need for accounting for exposure to the virus. And so, there was some communication tools around how you document exposure risk and how does that affect the eligibility of the donor for donations. So we use kind of a process that is being used with others like West Nile Virus or other viruses that have a large, a kind of a template for a process that we've used where there are infectious diseases that we have to deal with. There's also some recent exposure risk of personal information at a recruitment drive. We've had actually a couple of instances there.</p>

R5:	<p>So we've got 12,000 employees and that includes employees located here in the United States and abroad. So, here within the metro area we've got two offices located in Inver Grove Heights and Eagan. We have about twelve hundred, thirteen hundred in those two locations. So the other population, a large portion of them is located around the country. Here in the United States. And then a subset international.</p> <p>So we're talking about internal, change announcements, crisis issues, it is hard. Because we've got a lot of people in a lot of different locations, and lots of different types of connectivity. Some of our folks don't even have e-mail addresses. So we can't just shoot them an email to update them because they're working in an elevator or they're out in our refineries. So it gets a little challenging from time to time. It really does.</p> <p>At least the last year, what we've dealt with has been focused around, on the internal side, is the focus on change leadership. So we've had just within this last month we had a brand new CEO and a new board chairman. So that meant we had to do a transition plan in a matter of three weeks. So it was very challenging. I think we handled it pretty well, but whenever you have a change in leadership, especially to that magnitude, it can be really, really hard.</p> <p>I would say, from a standpoint of just the general economics around agriculture and energy this year have presented a lot of challenges. Our employees did not get their bonuses this year. So historically over the last probably 12 or 13 years the employees have gotten bonuses every year. So it had gotten to a point where folks just really kind of expect it to be there. Somewhat forgetting a little I think, being a little naive in that we do work in cyclical markets with energy and ag so it's going to go up it's going to go down. So there are times where we're probably not going to get it or at least the full value what those bonuses are. But that caused some big issues for folks internally. So that meant we needed to communicate what was happening in those environments, those industries as well. To just kind of have them understand.</p> <p>So we have had really, really, really good financials over the last especially five-six years. Because of the downturn in both of our markets, we've had tightening. And, in addition to that, while our underlying businesses are strong, really strong, we've got a couple of onetime events that are hitting our bottom line hard. Really hard. So we're preparing for actually noticing that here. We've been sharing some things incrementally along the way to try to have people be ready for what our next quarter results look like.</p>
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R5:	<p>Because we are worried about retention of employees. We've been incrementally, like I said, sharing information so it shouldn't be a shock to people in the hopes that this is our economics right now and we're going to continue to work hard to make sure we are strong so folks don't get worried and leave. So right now it's been kind of talked about more in an issue setting, but we know given where we're headed it could get to the point where it becomes a crisis and we could lose employees because of it.</p>
R6:	<p>We actually look at our crises... We use a color coded grid for intensity which helps us to identify the needed resources. So that we can wall off the crisis or the issue and manage it with the smallest amount of resources. And then the rest is business as usual and can continue in the event of a crisis. So green. Normal day. Really probably considered more of an issue with the green model. Yellow we start to have elevated it and that would entail minimal threat to human or animal health. Could they have a short-term consumer demand threat or a threat to current production practices? As we move into orange, it's considered consequential. And we have a potential... There is a potential threat to human or animal health. At that point, it threatens long term consumer demand or current production practices. And then red level we reserve... That's what we consider serious or our most concerning area. Serious threat to human or animal health or the ability of the industry to continue doing business. So we reserve that for specifically for foot and mouth disease or for an animal disease of that nature.</p> <p>One of the most serious crises that we've dealt with was H1N1, or what the media dubbed swine flu. And we worked on that for over a year for responding to every aspect of it. Responding to this name or the nomenclature of what the media were calling a disease that could potentially impact consumers understanding of the safety of our product as well from the consumer standpoint but also from the standpoint of our producers and what they needed to be doing to maintain the security and safety of their herd. Clearly that was in orange. It immediately it went to the orange state and stayed orange actually for over a year.</p>
R7:	<p>The 35W bridge collapsed on August 1, 2007 at 6:05 p.m. 13 people were killed more than 100 were injured. This was a very significant infrastructure failure because people drive over bridges all the time. Bridges just don't fall down. The subsequent investigation determined that back in the '60s when the bridge was built the design was flawed. There's a piece of steel on it that was supposed to be an inch thick. It was only half an inch thick and that ultimately would fail over the years as we had put more weight on the</p>

R7:	<p>bridge. On that day we were constructing the bridge, or doing the work, they were doing some scheduled maintenance work replacing bridge joints and such. There was also significant... because they're making concrete, there was sand or aggregate on the bridge which added significant weight to the structure.</p> <p>That had an external aspect and an internal aspect, and most of my work is on the external piece. I was sitting at home. It was in the National Guard at the time. I just got done with... I had taken Wednesday off. It was a Wednesday because had a meeting I had to go to. And I was sitting at home. My wife and daughters were gone on vacation to Colorado. And I got a phone call from CNN and said, 'what can you tell me about the bridge collapse?' This was about 6:10 p.m. I said, 'I had no idea.' I flipped on the TV and there it was. So I got dressed, penned the dog up. Got dressed in civilian clothes because I was still in my uniform. In fact, I was sitting down to eat. Ate quick. Got dressed and came back up here and spent a little bit of time up here and then I was dispatched to the state emergency operations center and spent three or four hours that evening fielding phone calls from all over the world wanting to know why the bridge collapsed. We had absolutely no idea because it was just hours after this occurred.</p> <p>I do know that here, my boss was here, and they were kind of working the issue both internally and externally. And you know, e-mails to employees... making sure employees understood.</p> <p>Ultimately, I left... After about three days at the EOC [Emergency Operations Center] then I was sent out to the bridge office. We have a state bridge office to help them because they were also getting many, many phone calls and requests, and we just decided it would be best to have someone out there full time for a while. Same thing. Nobody really understood. The same questions were always the same. Nobody really understood. Media was digging into a pretty good. I think the hardest thing in that whole experience is as the media, especially the Star Tribune, began to investigate this thing, they were trying to find the cause. And you know a lot of stories would come out. There were questions about inspectors or questioning of the inspectors and of the quality of the inspections.</p> <p>You know, when something terrible like that happens... what happens to the employee base is they all begin to feel like, 'wow! We made a mistake. I'm part of this organization that made a mistake. We look really bad right now. The public doesn't like us. The public doesn't trust us because one of our bridges has failed.' That's immediately where people went. Even though</p>
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R7:	<p>we didn't know why it collapsed. So I know the folks who were working up here how to deal with a lot of that. And that was a pretty significant challenge.</p> <p>The bridge collapsed in August. We started to build a new bridge. And I got shifted from the bridge office to that project and I was the project manager, communications manager for that project. And there... that both was an external facing job but I also made sure that we were pushing things out internally about what a great project this was. About how substantial this bridge was going to be. About a great working relationship between [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] and contractors.</p> <p>And that thing really flowed very, very well. We got it done in record time. We hired a contractor from out of state who was very, very skilled in this kind of bridge building. Did some unusual things. We brought in an ocean-going barge up the river and basically anchored it underneath the bridge. Right just several hundred feet downstream from a dam. So there was a great deal of current to deal with. Putting a giant crane on and that's how we lifted the bridge into place.</p> <p>It was a very interesting project and we did... I think the biggest, one of the most compelling things that we did was we had once a week we had... at least on Saturday mornings we had a scheduled tour of the bridge project. And if you're familiar with that bridge, there's the 35-W bridge and then about 75 yards away is the 10th Avenue Bridge. And the City of Minneapolis fenced off a walkway on the side of the 10th Avenue Bridge that faced the 35-W Bridge. And it was a perfect place for an audience. So we can walk. We'd walk down and talk about what was going on. You know, every four or five different spots on the bridge. We also did ad hoc tours. Someone would call up and say, 'hey....' I did a lot of [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] employee tours. Offices would come over. I remember my office came over and I dragged them around on the bridge. It was a little muddy that day if I remember right. But we were very open to communicating with employees. Anyone who wanted to see it could come and see it. We would make time for them. So it ended up being a pretty good thing, the new bridge.</p> <p>In the meantime, what was going on here and what was still rankling, creating rancor in the ranks, so to speak, the Star Tribune was doing a very thorough investigation. Some of the TV stations were working it too pretty hard. So employees were constantly seeing these stories questioning [NAME OF ORGANIZATION], questioning the bridge, trying to find out who was responsible and so on.</p>
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R7:	<p>And once the new bridge was up, the next aspect was dealing with the remaining steel. Because we had to keep the steel because there were lawsuits going on. Then the steel was considered evidence. When the National Transportation Safety Board, which is the organization that conducted the investigation, when they came on board they said, 'we need all the steel.' And they laid out the key pieces of steel down on Bohemian Flats. Basically took up a huge space down there. And once the bridge was built and everybody was gone and traffic was flowing, we still had to keep the steel there. And it stayed there for two or three years. So there were constantly questions about that. And periodic media requests to go down and look at the steel.</p> <p>When the NTSB completed its investigation they sent back what were considered to be the key pieces of steel. We stored them in a cold storage building over at the Oakdale truck station. It's up on... it's where County Road 5, it used to be Highway 5, and 694 intersect. There's a big [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] facility there. That's where the bridge office is. And that's where... we built the building specifically to house that steel. Although now we're using it as garage space.</p> <p>And eventually we reached the point where we were able to get rid of that. So what we did, before we did that, is we had an event where allowed people who are victims of the collapse. Your family members of those who died or people who were injured... to come to that facility and if they wanted a souvenir, a piece of steel, we would give them one. So we did that. We had several different days where we did that. And once all that was taken care of and we felt like everybody's needs... because there were other requests for it. There's a tradition in some engineering schools where they like to get steel from a failed piece of infrastructure then they create some sort of memento from graduating engineers. It could be a ring. It could be a pendant. Something. But the point is it's a constant reminder that the work that you do, lives depend on it and you need to be careful because it can fail. We got rid of the steel.</p> <p>We still get questions. This is the 10th anniversary this year of the bridge collapse. We're getting a few media questions. In fact, about an hour ago, I talked to a young woman who is an editorial intern. She wanted to know where the steel was from the bridge and said it was gone. Because we sold it to a scrap dealer. So we're still getting questions. And I anticipate we'll get quite a few more before August 1st.</p>
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R7:	<p>Employees... there was a change of administration. [NAME] was our commissioner. And so the bridge collapsed in August, the following February must have been a short session that year. In February, the Senate did the opposite of confirming her. They did not confirm her, and because they took the action, she was no longer the commissioner. So then [NAME] looked to a guy named [NAME]. He was the administrator of the Federal Highway Administration here in this region and was based over in Minneapolis. He came over and became [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] commissioner. And he asked me to be communications director because on the 35-W project he felt that I had done a pretty good job working with the media and he thought that we needed to work on our relationship with the media.</p> <p>So that's... I started here October 2008 and that's what I've been doing since. I've been the communications director since. So that's kind of a bridge project in a nutshell.</p> <p>Speaking of legislative sessions, if at some point in time you want to talk about another internal crisis that was probably in some ways a lot more severe, we can talk about the shutdown in 2012. Because there was a lot of work we had to do to keep employees informed, in order to keep the 5,000 employees informed.</p> <p>To me, the shutdown was a bigger crisis for employees because it affected every single one. There were 250 people out of 5,000 who stayed and on and they were spread out all over the state. So there were probably 20 up here. And then the rest, some at metro and some in each one of those districts. And so we had a daily conference call with everybody, or at least the leadership from all the districts, just to hear what was going on and communicate out what we knew about what was going on and any guidance issues they had within the district they had to deal with.</p>
R10:	<p>Pretty much everything you can think of. From data breach, workplace violence, executive misconduct, recalls in the medical world, bad patient outcomes, death, infectious diseases, and embezzlement, arrest, malfeasance. It's almost anything that mankind can do. We see it in the corporate world. We see in the nonprofit world. The first week I was here a board member was arrested for prostitution. OK. So stuff like that. You never know what the "it" is. Careless protocols that allow sensitive data, sensitive materials, to be left in the back seats of cars and stolen. We've had multiple cases such as that. Laptops being left at airports and things like that.</p>

R10:	<p>Pretty much anything you can think of because you're dealing with people and people make mistakes. People do things and things happen. I would say the most common ones that we see are a lot of data breaches, workplace violence, and especially in our city, we do a fair amount of healthcare. Bad patient outcomes. And it could be someone dies in delivery of a child and there's litigation and then litigation as a whole is a pretty significant issue for every organization that's out that window.</p> <p>We have everything from a handful of employees at small nonprofits to multinational globals. I would say the smaller the organization, particularly a nonprofit, the more personal it take these things. One of the most important things you can do in a crisis is not take it personally. You've got to be tough and you got to understand that people are upset with you because of the event not because of who you are.</p> <p>So, typically the smaller more grassroots organizations are a little bit more emotional. But once you get them moving, you can move quickly. Where the multinationals sometimes... where I can think of one right now. It's incredibly slow to get them to understand the significance or the magnitude of the crisis itself. And the real reason generally is fear. No one wants to run it up the ladder that this is a real issue. A very, very serious issue that could harm their reputation for many, many years to come. People don't want to tell the boss bad news. So the larger the organization the more political it tends to be. The more siloed it tends to be just in general and the slower it is to try to get them to move.</p> <p>There's too much fear in corporate America. You're going to lose your job anyway if the thing goes south and get fired anyway. If you're in charge of communications and you have a significant event, you're going to get fired. So you might as well try to handle it well. So you can wait to tell the folks to raise the level of concern to try to protect your job and protect your role but you ultimately lose it. The only way you have a chance to save yourself is to respond appropriately. You know we're big fans of that.</p> <p>Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you react to it. It's the reaction that counts. So in a general sense, the bigger ones are usually slower to understand the importance because it's difficult for any one issue to bring down you know a big cruise ship. The little hole in your fishing boat is a problem. The little fishing boat non-profit has a problem and they sink and they know it. The big companies, it's one of 100 things they're dealing with.</p>
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R11:	<p>I started in internal communications for a tech company and then move from there to [NAME OF COMPANY], now [NAME OF COMPANY], as a speechwriter and internal communicator. And then I went from there I went to [NAME OF COMPANY] where I was responsible for both internal and external. And that's where I was when I decided to start the business in '88. And I continued to have [NAME OF COMPANY], and so [NAME OF COMPANY] had been purchased by [NAME OF COMPANY] and I got moved to New York. Then I continued to have them as a client. So that's kind of my broad brush background.</p> <p>When I did internal communications for [NAME OF COMPANY] at that time we had 800 stores around the country and I used to say it didn't matter how great our external communications or PR initiatives were. You know that everybody in the store was our front line PR ambassador because that's what really would shape the public's perception of the company was the experience they had with the individual employees. So they are really the number one audience I think in any communications program, but especially in a crisis situation where things are just moving so rapidly.</p> <p>Probably the biggest crisis I was involved in when I was still within a company where... I don't know if you recall you're quite a bit younger but there's a book called the Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie. And it was immediately controversial. And it was condemned by the leadership in Iran. It was the first time that [NAME OF COMPANY] had a situation where they had received like 300 bomb threats in just a matter of a couple hours against all of their stores. And there was this sense of, you know, our people aren't part of a [NAME OF COMPANY] army. They're out in the public we can't suddenly protect hundreds of stores from this danger. And the company made the decision to pull the book off the shelves which then led to concern from the publishing community. You know, first amendment freedom.</p> <p>And so there was a lot of rapidly moving communication about that. And I went in to New York to help and you know we had a very important series of communications with the stores explaining what we've done and why. That type of thing. So that was probably the largest boots on the ground crisis that comes to mind in my career. But that piece of communicating with employees was incredibly significant and important and central to everything we did.</p> <p>We tend to help clients that we have relationships with if they have issues that they're facing.</p>
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Q2: What there a pre-crisis phase, and was any communication taking place during that time?	
R1:	<p>It was all a lot of, like, trying to think what would be the most effective way to communicate internally when and if a strike were to come. So, a lot of discussion around tone, frequency, who the messenger is. [NAME OF COMPANY] is a big organization and these strikes tended to feel to the people who were experiencing them like something that was happening at their hospital. And this is a communications challenge we face all the time anyway... which is, is this a sort of [NAME OF COMPANY] message going down from corporate, or is this a local leadership message coming from hospital leadership. And at the end of the day, you've got to use all of those things. But trying to decide what the most effective way to balance those messengers, and the tone of the message, and you know matching the message with the right messenger was a lot of the planning that went into it.</p> <p>That being said, I think we were surprised by the degree of vitriol and just flat out false information that the union was putting out. And I think that left us frankly a little bit flat footed and sort of flabbergasted. It was sort of endlessly frustrating that the union would say things that were patently false, unverifiable. And we spent a lot of time just responding to that. Which is not necessarily the place you want to be. And I don't have a great answer as to how you get out of that. You can sort of refuse to respond to it. But at the end of the day, if you do that, that's a problem as well. So yes, you're right. There was there was ample opportunity to plan and we saw this coming. That didn't make it any easier once we got into it. Just only really because this is such... the magnitude of what was happening here was so huge.</p> <p>We've certainly had crises that have come up that have had no warning on. But they weren't as disruptive as this. I mean, you know, when we have a privacy breach or even a medical error, it tends to be an isolated event that can be best explained and at worst probably apologized for. But then everyone kind of moves on. This, you know, obviously directly impacted our ability to perform our essential functions for our community over a very long period of time. So it's just a whole different magnitude of crisis.</p>
R3:	<p>Yeah definitely we do. And we do that in a number of ways. I think first, I think relationship building in general is really important. And I actually consider that one of the most effective ways we manage the issues and prepare for crises. I think people think, 'oh, it's good have relationships and that's important.' But that's not what you would first think of when you're planning for a crisis.</p>

R3:	<p>The reality for us, particularly for example in the athletic space, is when I first came on board there was very coordination or even relationship between the athletics' communicators and us centrally. And it meant that the President, the Board of Regents, other university leaders, including our office which handles most of the media requests from non-sports reporters, we were often surprised. Something bad would happen in athletics. Student athlete would be arrested. There would be an assault. There would be fraud of some sort. And we'd read about it in the paper. And that was a huge problem because it didn't allow anyone to look like they were prepared.</p> <p>And so one of the significant things we've done in the last five years is really intentionally build close working relationships with athletics. And not just at the leadership levels. We've really focused on building those relationships deep within our respective teams so that if something is bubbling, and maybe hasn't become crisis yet but could be, we have a clear line of sight on that. And we're actually jumping in to help them think it through, anticipate what be the tipping point to a crisis, and prepare for it. So I actually consider relationship building and making sure that you have a good coverage of relationships where there are the biggest risks in your organizations is important.</p> <p>Another example of that is, you know on this campus we are very public, we're very open. We're in the middle of two cities, two counties. You know, a transit district. You name it. So we actually build very specific relationships with other public information officers at other agencies. And in fact, when we practice large scale crisis preparation exercises, we often invite them to join us at the table so that we're building that relationship together.</p> <p>Beyond relationships, we do have an issues management group at the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] that actually just started around beginning in the calendar year of this year. And this group was formed... it's generally made up of Chiefs of Staff level people from across the university. So they kind of represent vice presidents essentially. And the thinking is that they are best equipped to both keep their leader informed and to engage their leader at the right time in helping to manage the issue. But they're also the doers. Right? They aren't going to go off and assign it to eight people.</p> <p>So we built this team, first of all, to build better trust and relationships. It's focused on managing issues. So the goal here is to solve problems and to get out ahead of issues that could become crises. So it's really the front end work. We to do scenario planning. This group, however, does not focus on the emergency responses. We're focusing more on difficult issues like protests, campus climate, and race and diversity issues.</p>
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R3:	<p>We discussed an issue with this week's meeting about, what does the university do when we have a corporate donor that is not popular by a large stakeholder group in other parts of its business but wants to give us money in an area that seems counter-intuitive given their outside history. And so what do you do as a university the middle of a fundraising campaign? You can't always turn the gift away, but when would we? And how do you communicate about philanthropy? And how do you steer the gift toward the right thing to help stakeholders? So this group is kind of talking about a variety of issues that, left unhandled, could become a crisis.</p> <p>And then the emergency management sorts of crises, the active shooter, an explosion on campus, a riot in the neighborhood, those things are already very well practiced and are managed in a top down way through our Director of Emergency Management, our police department. And so in that regard, communicators are not really leading the planning effort, we are participating with other agencies. To practice. To develop plans, enhance protocols. And in those instances, from a communications standpoint, we have very well scripted those types of incidents. We know if there is an active shooter, we're going to pull out the messaging about active shooters. And it's going to give us basically a template to get us through the first half hour, hour of the incident. In those incidents, if they're big enough, we also have an emergency operations center on campus. And we will open that and everyone from the various parts of the university will come together in the same room to manage the emergency.</p> <p>So, our approach is multifaceted. And one of the things we've been really trying to do lately is to right size our response. Because we realize that the university, in particular, is so heavily scrutinized by the public, by legislators, by others, that if we under reactor that's a problem for us. But frankly, if we overreact, we can actually cause a crisis around something that might have actually been an issue we could have managed had we not gone berserk. You know, I think the political pressure affects how crises are handled. Sometimes that's in a good way. In other times, it means organizations misstep or overreact.</p> <p>[Has this relationship-building strategy been effective?]</p> <p>Absolutely. Yes. University-wide it has made us better. We've developed a culture that the university where communications directors understand that they should call us as soon as they get a hunch or a gut feeling that something might go awry. And that first call might just, 'here's what's going on. Can you help me think through the issue?' And it may fizzle completely. From our perspective though, it allows us to give advice. It allows us to figure out is this something that we need to let the president or another leader know so they're not caught off guard? Or is</p>
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R3:	<p>it something we need to pull in other resources from the university to solve the problem before it becomes big?</p> <p>Because of the relationship building and the trust we've built, I think people have confidence that we're going to handle the small situations well. So, therefore, they have more confidence in us in the big ones.</p> <p>We're in a place where the communicators generally call us immediately. And we actually had one incident that was more of an emergency response where the communicator... we had a student working in a science lab and the experiment he was working on actually exploded and it blew out the protection glass and injured him and we had to evacuate the building because of the gases he was working with. The communicator actually called our office before she called 911 and we notified dispatch of the incident. That is an extreme example. But yes, the relationship building means that we are in the loop early, which is what we need.</p>
R4:	<p>So we had visibility that that was going to occur. About six weeks or so before it happened. So the order of events... we sort of look at what we knew, sort of the kind of market conditions. And what was happening in the marketplace, on transplants it was leveling off. We needed to basically look at what... where could we either look at programs or look at work that was being done that was not absolutely critical and how we could think differently about either this operational efficiency or other ways to address just the fact that volume had decreased. And as a result of that, we had for kind of a state of the state meeting. So we did that meeting with all of our staff. So it was those folks... at that point we were still in our old building... but the folks that were located there as well as training people remotely, and kind of walked through here is the state of the union so to speak.</p> <p>And then we made a commitment to sort of ... there would be two different points where we would know what changes were going to be made in terms of reductions and so on. So we kind of put that timeline out and sort of put out the commitments that we were doing this now with the intent of only doing it you know collectively one time. And so that was sort of the commitment made to people.</p> <p>And then the ensuing process was to work with leaders across the organization to identify sort of where they felt there was opportunity to reduce workforce in their respective areas. And then for each of those areas we built out the communication plan in sequence that included the team message for leadership to us in discussions with individuals and this sequence, the order, of how that would happen. And the timeline as when people would be told. And from there, they would have some time to transition activity and then a follow-up</p>

R4:	<p>communication to the group to indicate what the new structure or new picture was going to look like. So on the day that it occurred, there was kind of this all clear message that it happened as well.</p> <p>I along with Human Resources and strategic business partners worked directly with leaders. So on the state of the state I worked directly with the CEO and HR to craft the story and those messages, and then for each area where there was reduction occurring I work directly with the HR and strategic business partner in those areas along with the leaders in developing their messaging and is ensuring that we had, you know, every impacted person, whether they were impacted directly by the reductions or whether someone or their team was impacted or the person they reported too was impacted, to map all of that out to ensure that we had, you know, ahead of time for anybody who is going to be touched by that.</p> <p>Then following there were two dates, one at the end of April and the other at the end of May, where there were a reductions. And following the one at the end of May, early in June there was kind of a bookend all staff meeting, sort of starting with the state of the union and kind of ended with, 'now this is kind of how the organization looks now.' So that was kind of the end to end process.</p>
R5:	<p>In regards to the pre- work, I would say as much as we can we are pretty dang open. We have very candid conversations. So like, our new CEO will just take the question. He doesn't shy away from any question. He is very open, very honest. So we will work a lot of things in to his messages that many companies just wouldn't share. One of the challenges that we have though is that because we're publicly traded, we can only share to a certain point before it gets too forward looking.</p>
R7:	<p>For all the employees, the big thing was when do we get to come back to work. How long will this last. One of the challenges was to not speculate because I remember thinking, you know, you've got the Fourth of July weekend and leaders are going to want to make everybody feel a little pain. And then the Fifth of July it'll be over. Well it wasn't till the 21st or 22nd.</p> <p>We had to be creative. And the media was very cooperative because, well this was the big story. So they would come and ask us. I think I did an interview almost every day.</p> <p>One of the advantages I think that we had in just getting set up for that shutdown was... So we got some grants from Homeland Security. It was a big deal at that time. This must have been about 2005 or 2006. It was to train people in disaster preparation and response. So everybody got trained in the National Incident Management System, NIMS. That's pretty universal now. That's what the state</p>

R7:	<p>EOC uses. We've done a lot of training back then. And that's what we use here more or less. That was the set-up that we used when we had the shutdown. They used it for the bridge collapse too. They set up a [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] out in Roseville.</p> <p>The thing with that big crisis and the bridge was the state emergency operations center fired up. And when that happens then we all become part of that. So we're not [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] any more, we're part of the state and the emergency operation response. Whereas in the shutdown, it was it was more of the governor, but we did have a little more latitude to talk about what we were doing and, more importantly, weren't doing. You know, offering safety messages and things like that.</p>
R8:	<p>So there's the telephone hotline. But this list... that we had them sign up... So they had to use their personal e-mails, obviously, because everything was shut down. And there were also those of us that were staying on, we were directed from [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] ... you're only supposed to keep the Band-Aid on. We really didn't have any extra time to do other work. I had visions of doing other work. So we had those limitations on what resources could be used to communicate to our employees.</p>
R10:	<p>I can't ask someone to help me if I don't know them. And it could be.... having third party advocates who are willing to be a buffer for you, as a supporter for you, an advocate for you on your worst day is really important because the goal is to not be judged by that one event. Who you are shouldn't be based on one day or one time or one event. And so you have those outside advocates who can say, 'you know that's a really good company. They have great a great safety record. They have a great EPA record. They have great people.' Whatever it is and what you do is you're buffering them.</p> <p>Regulators... they hate the word partners. But we've had more cases than I can count where your regulator doesn't kill you on Day 1. So if you had a product recall or we had an apple recall a couple of years ago. We went right to the regulator and we'd been working with the regulator you know in good faith and we knew them. Whether it was the California Department of Agriculture or the FDA. And we said, 'here's what our problem is and we're going to work with you and we're going to help you write it. We're going to help you put the recall notice out and communicate to all the people you want us to communicate.' So knowing those people you can go to them with a problem and say, 'you know us. You trust us. You know that we're inherently good. We've been here for 50-60 years. Here's our problem. Give us some time to work on it.' So having those outside advocates is tremendously important. There's a case I can think of right now where that</p>

R:10	<p>didn't happen. And a state ag board is contemplating pulling a product from the market. That doesn't happen if you have great relationships with the regulators. So in your case if there was something going on in the agricultural world and if I'm in an agricultural business, I absolutely want to know the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. I want to be able to pick up the phone. I want to get on the phone or walk in and say I need to talk to you for 15 minutes and explain what it is. And the only way we can do that is if we have a relationship.</p>
R11:	<p>In every organization there are influencers and they're not necessarily driven just strictly by title. They're people to carry messages effectively through the organization and have a lot of credibility. So identifying those people you know maybe having them part of a communication is fascinating.</p>

Q3: What internal communications was taking place during the crisis, and what were the strategies for the communication? What were some of the challenges?

R1:	<p>So we have a... we have a process during the negotiations, and even when you're on strike, that a certain amount of negotiation that still goes on. And so we have an electronic deliverable that we call 'Negotiation News.' So every time there is a negotiation session between the union and [NAME OF COMPANY], we would create a written summary of what was discussed and what if any progress was made during that negotiation session of that day and send it out to all employees of [NAME OF COMPANY] as soon as you could at the conclusion of the negotiation session.</p> <p>There was a time when we would have only sent that to the employees who were part of it, who were in the union that's negotiating, but we decided in this case, and we've done this over the last couple of cycles, to send it to all the employees so that they could see... so that everyone had the same view of what was going on at the bargaining table. So as that was going on, you know, it sort of came to the point where... 'another negotiation session today and no progress was made.' And we got into some detail about 'we offer this' and 'here's what the union's response would be on that.' Here's the response. The union would do similar things. They would put out sort of their version of what happened and, you know, you would get a very different flavor by reading their version. But we just kept after it and, you know, 'for the record, this is what happened.' When we got into a strike mode, the internal and the external communication started to come together a little bit because we had to report to the community. We felt we did,</p>
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R1:	<p>especially early on, that our ability to serve the community was not going to be diminished.</p> <p>So we had a strike actually happen in two phases. There was a weeklong strike and that ended and then about a month later they called their indefinite strike which stretched on into the fall. The weeklong strike in June we had a press conference every single day reporting to the assembled media how... what we call patient volumes were in our hospital. How busy they were. We would report in patient census, births because it's just sort of a proxy of, you know, one of the things that community sort of thinks of hospitals because they have a baby. So we wanted to show that those were tracking as what they normally were. And emergency room visits was the other sort of daily metric that we reported on. And we were able to demonstrate through that, that this is temporary nursing staff that we were able to contract with and was able to keep our hospitals running more or less as normal. And that was an important message both externally but also internally. Because I think... the strike only affected four of our hospitals the rest of the company you know is watching this and wanting to know is this hurting us. What is the impact on our ability to function? So keeping them informed as to that was important as well.</p> <p>Once we got into the second strike, I think the sort of daily internal communications really slowed down a bit. We got to the point where we would communicate when there was something to communicate... whether there was a negotiation session scheduled or if we felt we had to respond to some particularly outrageous thing. The union had said at one point during the first strike... the union held one of their press conferences out in the park outside of [NAME OF HOSPITAL] and declared that a patient inside [NAME OF HOSPITAL] had died because of an error made by a temporary nurse. That was completely fabricated. There was no basis to that. It just did not happen.</p> <p>But you know, this was another frustration. The media... I was fairly disappointed in, in many ways with how the media covered the strike because they didn't work very hard to verify anything like that. They were content to just sort of report the he said she said. And so the next day, there is a screaming headline in the paper that says 'union says a patient killed by temporary nurse.' And of course, in paragraph 6 it says [NAME OF COMPANY] said it didn't happen. This sort of endlessly frustrating there. So those are the things we had to respond to as they happened. But as the strike wore on, we got to less of a regular cadence and more of an as needed until we got to the very end when, if you were watching this, the way this whole thing got resolved is that the governor called us into a negotiation session at his governor's residence in St. Paul and basically said you're not leaving</p>
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R1:	<p>until you solve this. This is like a marathon almost 24-hour negotiations session at the end of which we made a deal.</p> <p>And of course, there was a lot of communication after that as well. Trying to sort of, you know, finally our long national nightmare is over, but also trying to sort of set the stage for healing and moving forward because there was a lot of hard feelings both from the nurses who were on strike who felt they got a raw deal and weren't happy. I mean, the other thing to note is that what the nurses were demanding, that they be able to keep their customized nurses and health insurance benefits, they did not achieve. We prevailed in that dispute and we were able to switch them out of those plans into the health insurance that everyone else has.</p> <p>So there are nurses who felt like they suffered through this strike and didn't get what they were hoping. There was also a lot of hard feelings among employees who are not on strike and who felt that some of the things the nurses had said publicly into the press were the lies. That really made them upset. And not only because they were untrue and tried to tear down the reputation of the organization that we all want to succeed ostensibly, but because on top of that you know so many of these people had to do so much extra work because the nurses were on strike. So this idea that you know you're out on the picket line walking around having a grand old time while I'm in here doing three times the work to take care of patients didn't sit well with a lot of people. And so when those nurses came back, it wasn't exactly warm hugs you know on the way back in. But communications can also help manage that process. And now here we are getting on to is about it exactly one year ago that the first strike was called, and I won't say that all those wounds have healed at this point but I think we've done a lot to move that in the right direction.</p>
R2:	<p>You're doing in your best scenario, you're doing a lot of things all the time. Because the key to your internal communications is candor and as much transparency as you can afford. But also relatively consistent communication. It shouldn't be spotty or hit or miss. It should be either on a predictable time line or you know predictably regular, or reliably regular I should say.</p> <p>You want to be doing things that are multi-layered. Meaning, I want to send e-mail. I want to give speeches. I want write a memo. I want to go to town halls. You want to hit people many, many times. The general principle is that people don't hear or understand the first, second, or even third time you tell them. You got to keep going. The more venues you can do, the better.</p> <p>We talked about using external sources as a way to influence internal audiences. The Star Tribune, for instance, in this community is a highly, highly effective way</p>

R2:	<p>of speaking to your employee population. If you land the story you need or avoid the story you don't want to have, you could effectively communicate to your internal population.</p> <p>Then finally, the gold standard is on in which you can engage with your employee population both ways. So it is not a monologue, but rather it's a dialog. And the reasons for that are two-fold. One is obvious, which is people like to be heard. They don't liked to just be talked to. Second is, the canary in the coal mine is a very real phenomenon. The more you know what people are thinking the more you head off at the pass when you see a rising crisis. Because internal communications crises, or internal crises, they don't have one shape and they don't follow a linear path. Frequently they will surprise you with the, of the smorgasbord of things for you to be concerned about, the thing you're most unhappy about is "X". I would have never have guessed that. But because I'm in a dialog with you, I now know that and I can address it.</p>
R3:	<p>So in a true emergency that has widespread impact like a shooter incident, we've contracted with an outside company to do emergency text messaging. So if there's an incident on campus, we would immediately within minutes, and this is done by our police dispatch, they would send out a text message that says, 'Armed person near X. Stay clear of the area. Watch for updates.' You know, it's a tweet-like text so it's very brief and it has to be concise, but it is about notifying literally the entire campus, faculty, staff, students, immediately at once. And that's usually our fastest way to get information out.</p> <p>What we will often do is couple that with is directing people to our website and my team and the emergency management teams have the ability to, at a click, take over the entire homepage of the university. We can put an emergency banner at the top, which is what we most often use. And that can, again, be more of a notice-like thing but then we can link to a webpage where we have scrolling, more complete updates. We could also, if there was something really, really significant, we could take over the entire homepage and just use that as kind of a listing of instructions what to do, how to remain safe, updates about the situation.</p> <p>So again, those sorts of electronic tools where you can kind of steer people to a place where you can provide more comprehensive information and to do that immediately, is important. The texting, like I said our dispatch handles, the website we can do from anywhere as long as we've got internet access. It's just a simple webpage that we log in to, enter the text, click, post, and it's up.</p> <p>The things that probably fall more in the issues that could evolve into a crisis, like the crime on campus, we use a lot of e-mail communication and social media. So in a more evolving crisis, we can obviously provide more comprehensive</p>

R3:	<p>messaging. You know, in the case of increasing crime on campus, I wouldn't call it a crisis, but it could have become one because these incidents were happening quite frequently. Some multiple days in a row. We were starting to hear from parents. Starting to hear from students about why aren't you telling us what's going on.</p> <p>We also, you know, apart from the communications, had to solve the problem. So we increased the... we have a system called Gopher Chauffeur that gives free rides to students on campus if they're fearful of their safety or they just need a safe ride home. They can call and get that free ride. So we had to upgrade those services as well to solve the problem.</p> <p>And then finally, I'd say social media is key, not only for students but faculty and staff as well. And again, particularly in those unexpected emergency situations. Those often become the best way to communicate as opposed to a press statement or something. You need to do the press statement. But because of timeliness and because we want those initial messages to be unfiltered, social media often is the best way to do that. It's also immediate. So in one of those high profile emergencies, we frankly need a few minutes to physically get from our office to the emergency operations center or to pull the team together to get things moving. So in that sense, A tweet or Facebook post is a really easy in the first minutes... a way to notify the broader community that something is going on. And that gives us a little extra time to kind of get our other pieces in order.</p>
R4:	<p>So the first thing that we did, in terms of our communication, was setting up an all-employee meeting and used PowerPoint slides. We walked them through the volume... where we were with the volume of unrelated transplants, and what the projections were for the rest of our fiscal year. Our fiscal year runs from October to September. And so really we looked at our costs and addressed the need that we were going to have to make some changes including potentially a reduction in workforce.</p> <p>Then we outlined kind of a process that was going to happen as a way to evaluate what changes they were going to make and then commit to a timeline for when the decisions would be made. And that was done through a combination again of showing the presenter, and again that was [NAME OF CEO] the CEO, and those slides. I believe they followed up also a written communication after that. Then for a period of time communication was targeted based on the specific impacts to a department.</p> <p>We wanted to be as transparent as we could be. That was something that was really important was to ensure that we were sharing as much information as soon as we could. And knowing the kind of stress and confusion this was going to cause,</p>

R4:	<p>we wanted to do it as quickly as we could so that we were not prolonging that kind of state of uncertainty.</p> <p>We also wanted people to hear any information about themselves specifically... that they would hear that directly from their leader. So that they knew that they would hear it privately before they would hear anything publicly. We relied a lot on those leaders as the primary communication point-person for their folks. So we really looked at them as the primary ones to communicate. They certainly had partnerships from our strategic business partners in terms of the details of the transition. But the sort of the deliverers of the information were primarily the leaders.</p> <p>We also wanted people to kind of be oriented to understand where we were in the process. So those two dates that I mentioned that were decision points... once we were done with all of the communication activities for that day then we would send out a communication to the impacted department to say, 'all of the communications regarding decisions made today have been over and complete.' So it was kind of a way of saying, 'all clear. So if you haven't had any communication specific to your role today, you're not going to. Your position isn't changing.'</p> <p>And then we also relied on a strategy of coming back around again to those teams to sort of show them the picture of now this is what your department will look like going forward. So for those... because there was some restructuring that was needed based on the reduction itself.</p> <p>So our core principles are really around transparency, providing as much information as we could, ensuring that leaders knew information prior to their employees finding out, and then also that any information about someone who was directly impacted they would get that before anyone else knew, aside from their leader. We tried to create space so that we were able to be as respectful as we could. We also talked very specifically in the communication about being respectful to those around you... that we will not be releasing lists of names of people who were transitioning out of the organization out of respect for those individuals. So it was kind of a combination of things that were really intended to try to create an atmosphere of respect and to be transparent.</p>
R5:	<p>I would love to say it was employees first. It was right at the same time. So that's something that I want to keep working towards is giving them just a little more notice. But we have to work through legal things there.</p> <p>We do give our leadership team, we call them ELT for us. The executive leadership team, which is about 80 or so people across the company. And those folks, just</p>

R5:	<p>within the last couple of months... we have to give them notice. Because if we're employees, the first place we're likely to go have a conversation is with our supervisor. And if they're sitting there going, 'I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't seen an email.' That's a really hard place to put people. So you're building any trust that way either.</p> <p>So we have built in about an hour where it goes to them first and then it goes out to everybody else. Or we'll have call with ELT too. If there's an opportunity for us to fit in time, we'll schedule a call, a half hour - hour call, and then let folks ask questions. So they're kind of processing along with us during that time too. They do have a SharePoint site too where they put everything, so they have the latest on what messages are there, what documents they can use if they're reaching out to customers. That's kind of got to be a repository for all the documents they need. But nothing gets away from just a good solid time to read through something or a call to kind of process something.</p> <p>So the internal website is one. We call it [NAME OF WEBSITE]. So we put information there. Our new CEO is a big advocate for town hall meetings. We actually have one later this week. We do those more often now. And we do... we're going to start to move them around, but we mainly do them at our headquarter office in Inver Grove. And then we have hired an outside group that comes in that helps us to do a web broadcast of it so folks can log in. They can ask questions. So we take questions from the computer. And then we take questions live right here. And then we record it. And we make it available because our international employees just would never see it given the time.</p> <p>Our company culture is very face-to-face focused. So if I can get [NAME OF CEO] on skype or if I can get him in the room with another group or meeting, I know that will help to build his credibility. He's been with our organization for 33 years so he's got incredible time. But he was an energy guy. And we're an ag company. Most people see us as an ag company. So we have to give him a bit more ag time. And then he will do townhalls. When he goes out and meets with our cooperative owners, he will then meet with employees. We're also going to start a blog for him.</p>
R6:	<p>So actually that was one of the key learnings that we had coming out of H1N1 was that we needed to be communicating more with our general staff who weren't as intimately involved with the crisis response. And we have since changed our crisis plan to more thoroughly communicate with our general staff on a more regular or as needed basis during a crisis than we have. That's why one of the teams is internal communication. It is making sure that staff are aware because they're answering questions from their audiences. And so we want to make sure that they</p>

R6:	<p>are armed and prepared and good message carriers to their particular audience. So we definitely have upgraded since H1N1.</p> <p>We had talking points. Making sure that internal staff had talking points available. But we apparently weren't as effective at sitting down, having a staff meetings with all staff. So they would get talking points as the talking points were updated. But the talking points weren't being updated daily. They were just being updated as an update was needed. And what we found out that we needed to have... every couple of days we needed a staff either minimal e-mail or meeting as to, you know, 'here's what you need to know today. This is where we are today.'</p> <p>And again, our goal is to wall off the crisis so that we can continue with business as usual with the rest of the organization. So you know we want to balance our use of resources in making sure that everyone has the information that they need to proceed forward. But we also want to make sure that we're not spending all of our time in an all-staff meeting. If that makes sense.</p> <p>So those were triggers. We had triggers that would identify when we needed to either have an all-staff meeting or send out an all-staff email. Clearly, one of those triggers is every time that the talking points changed. Then they went with a minimum of an e-mail explaining what had happened and what the new talking points meant and how to use them. But we also tried to... now we try to update our staff more frequently based on, again, based on the threat, the color of situation that we're in. So orange, we're going to update staff much more frequently than we will on a green situation.</p> <p>So PED was different than anything, than situations we've dealt with before. From an industry standpoint, it was again that walling off worked successfully with PED. We were able to use our science and technology folks and our communications folks, and in their early part of it our consumer marketing. That team was intimately involved first from a consumer standpoint with the message, 'pork is safe.' But then from a producer standpoint of what you need to do on your farm if you don't have it and what you need to do on your farm if you do have it. Those were kind of a two key audiences there, and then helping all these audiences... we have 44 state associations and they all have staff. And helping all of those folks also understand what their role is and what they need to know.</p> <p>PED was interesting in that from an industry standpoint it was really high yellow most of the time. But if you had it on your farm or in your region, then at your farm level it was red, clearly. Our plans are written... we help our producers write crisis plans for their farm. We have the farm level crisis plan. We have a state association crisis plan. We have a show pig crisis plan. And then we have the industry plan that is a joint plan between those organizations that I mentioned.</p>
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R6:	<p>And the plans are all built off the same framework. So a producer is using the same language that we are and that the states are.</p> <p>We needed to make sure that everybody knew what was going on and what to expect, and what kind of questions they were going to get and how to respond to those questions.</p> <p>We had our team together. So they were scheduled to always be at the same time and honestly we always had food there. Which, as you know... because selfishly we didn't want to lose anyone. As the crisis coordinator, this is going to sound really selfish, but I didn't want to lose people going to lunch when we needed them focused on this issue. And the best time to schedule a meeting was over the lunch hour. So we have of the four organizations... we have the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] here. The [NAME OF ORGANIZATION], has an office in Des Moines and an office in Washington D.C. And [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]... their office is in Colorado. And the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] has an office in Des Moines and an office is North Carolina. So we needed to make sure that we were meeting at a time that was appropriate across three time zones. And the noon hour just really worked the best.</p> <p>And like I said, if you were here in this office you got fed. But what we did was to put an agenda out each day that we followed for every one of those meetings and that agenda started out with: where we are today, so what's new, what's changed in the last 24 hours, and then after what's changed, then it was where we go with strategy from here. So strategy had already been figured out when we got into that core crisis team meeting and that strategy came from a small group meeting that included me and the CEOs and just a handful, like six people total. So we could determine the strategy that we needed. Then we would carry that into the larger group and talk about... we would go through each one of the teams and they would say, 'okay. Knowing that we need to do this and this and we'll do it in this amount of time.' And then the next meeting would be okay what's changed? What's your update? Did you get it done? What's our new strategy if the strategy is changed in that length of time?</p> <p>In the early days, there were times where we had a couple of these meetings a day. But then, I would say for the majority of the time, it was just one meeting a day and then as we get towards the end, you know, we backed it off to every other day, and then extended it out every couple days. And then you know as needed. It was definitely a bell curve. Sometimes the left side of the bell goes up way faster than you want it.</p> <p>It was monumental [for staff]... is how I would describe it. We need it to be able to access resources, and by resources I mean both financial as well as human capital</p>
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R6:	<p>that needed to focus on the situation at hand. And there were other programs and things going on at the same time that we pulled people away from. The physical and emotional stress.</p> <p>What I would say, also monumental... that's a good way to say it in that you were really focusing on the issue at hand if you were part of the core crisis team. The one thing in agriculture is everybody wants to help and that's usually a very good thing. But when we have a plan, sometimes we need to remind people that there's a reason we have that plan and that strategy, and how we can best serve our audiences utilizing that plan.</p>
R7:	<p>Our website was pretty good but it wasn't as sophisticated as it is now. We do have a cohort of employees who don't really have access to computers. They're working on trucks or in trucks and on the road, or out working on the road. So the newsletter was a great way because what we do is have them print it and thrown on the break table at truck stations.</p> <p>I think another crisis where we worked really hard to communicate internally was a 2011 shutdown. She and I were the two that were here and we did a daily newsletter. We set up an e-mail system so that people could you know subscribe. Employees could subscribe to this email system and then we would send out periodic emails just let them know what was going on. We had a 1-800 number set up and we would periodical change the voicemail and just let people know what was going on. The big concern was when can we come back to work. So that voicemail would be, 'well, here's what's happened so far. Here's when the next meeting is scheduled. So we don't know. But keep calling in every couple of days and we'll let you know. And also pay attention to the media because if we if we can't get through to you, the media will know right away if a shutdown has ended and you'll know what you need to know about coming back to work.'</p> <p>And before employees left they were all educated on here's how a shutdown works. Here's how we call you back to work. Here's how much time you have to get back to work. And so on.</p> <p>And we have a very robust chain of command here. I'm the office director. She works for me. She has people work for her. So I call her and then she calls her people. It's from the top all the way down. So that would be a way of notification too. So we have several different ways of communicating here. We've got the e-mails that we can push out. We've got an internal website that we can change almost immediately. We've got out bi-weekly newsletter that we push out and we can do special editions if something big is coming and that needs to be a focus. That gets emailed to all employees. And then we have the chain of command communication structure. You know, the commissioner walks down the hall and</p>

R7:	<p>tells his two deputies something. They have division directors who work for them and they push it to them. The division directors have a bunch of office directors and district engineers who work for them, and so on.</p> <p>And usually to be really effective, we're pushing stuff out here on the channels I talked about that we manage. And management is also pushing the same messages down through that chain and you create places where people can ask questions. If you got a question, email here. We track those and try and get answers back to the individual or put them up on a website. Because if one person has a question and ask that, there's probably 10 people who have the same question.</p>
R8:	<p>Yeah I know we had a weekly newsletter, employee newsletter. At that time was a weekly newsletter. Maybe it had switched. We kind of went weekly, at least it during that time, so our employee newsletter captured a lot of the stuff that was going on and the roles different people internally were playing. With the recovery and rescue and rebuild. And simultaneously, as Kevin probably told you, was the starting of the development of the new bridge. So they were kind of running parallel at the same time.</p> <p>We probably did initially send out e-mails from the commissioner to employees. But it was kind of like full emergency run. You know you kind of just... just in time kind of communication. So the newsletter also captured historically you know stuff that was going on. And then at the same time there was this statewide bridge inspection. Any bridge that was like that one that collapsed. So there's a whole different effort going on and so we're communicating about that.</p> <p>So I'd say the newsletter was probably our primary internal communications thing.</p>
R9:	<p>We do ourselves an injustice and disservice when we focus on crisis communication because that means as communications advisers, as consultants, as strategic advisers, we are only there to provide direction as to how to message a bad situation as opposed to how to come up with a strategic way to resolve the situation. And guess what? Messaging is pretty easy. And so I kind of through crisis communications years ago, I was tired of being told to you know put lipstick on a pig and I decided I didn't want to have the pig anymore.</p> <p>So when it comes to what I'll term crisis management as opposed to crisis communications, and I hope this I hope this is still applicable, this is about actions because actions speak louder than words. And if one is only actions without really conveying the resolution, redemption, reformation, however you want to look at it, if there are no actions there then it's all going to fall flat.</p>

R9:	<p>So for us what we've learned every crisis the core things. One, you want to ensure your response and your messages enable and are not impediments to your strategic organizational objectives. Where do you want to be in two years or three years? And you want to be certain that how you address this crisis puts you on the path to get there. Maybe even propel you. But not be a barrier to it.</p> <p>Number two, act in a manner and convey messages in a manner that reflects your organizational values. That's what your brand is ultimately. I mean, the credibility you have truly is all about your values. And if you move in a direction that fulfills those values, even if you don't succeed, people will recognize you stayed on the right path. On the path that they would expect you to take. If you diverge from your values, then you're in a different place. And it's not going to be a good one.</p> <p>The third factor is you. You want to.... so you're fulfilling your strategic objective here, following your values, and you're doing what your primary audiences expect and count on you to do so. If you're not following your values and you're not kind of satisfying their expectations, their trust, their regard for you, then all bets are off. So for employees, I think to your question, values are enormous. Especially in circumstances where they have seen the leadership take them in a direction that really doesn't reflect the values that they have once embraced.</p> <p>So here there's an example. Years ago, we got called to a medical device company. I'm not free to name names here. And when we arrived, there was a big two foot by four foot poster framed in gold on the wall in the lobby, and integrity and honesty were at the top of the list of what were then deemed 'our corporate values' for this medical device company. Why we were there? Because their CEO was about to be indicted for health care fraud and two weeks later their chief counsel was indicted for health care fraud. So we had a lot of things to grapple with. And the initial place where people wanted to go was, 'how do we respond to this news? What do we tell people?' And you know, after a lot of more cathartic sharing on their part we got them to pause. We spent a significant time understanding how we got into this position and why red flags were missed and how this might affect their market, the sales of their product, etcetera. Then we asked about, 'where do you want to be in three or five years, and what are the values to guide you there?' And when we got to the values, I mean, that was that, 'oh my god. This is where we need to start living with what is up on the wall out there. Our employees have grown increasingly disillusioned.' And this crisis was a way to turn that around, re-right the ship, and get those employees to dedicate themselves to the organization. And we pursued actions, and messages that mentioned the word trust.</p>
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R10:	<p>In a crisis we love you to lose your keyboards. We hate e-mails because more times than not there is litigation. Now, in certain organizations you have to. It's the only way you can reach your people. But be very limited what you put it in writing because you're creating a paper trail for discovery for plaintiffs' lawyers. So we tell people to lose their keyboards.</p> <p>Depending on the size of the organization, we often counsel people to bring in small group meetings. So say you're a hospital. Bring your nurses in from each floor. You're a manufacturing site. As the new shift comes on and leaves, do a small kind of town hall meeting. Talk to people versus just sending things... as best you can. And that's the way we recommend you communicate with your people anyway. So whatever channels you typically use keep using them. But we would move in favor of the more face-to-face, verbal, the better especially in a crisis.</p>
R11:	<p>We had a whole store communication system at the time, and I don't remember exactly how it worked. Everything is instantaneous today and I don't think we had instantaneous communication. There were regular ways to communicate with the stores. I think we could conference. I think there were probably some conference calls and letters from the chair, from the president, and so on.</p> <p>[What advice do you give clients during a crisis?]</p> <p>Developing a plan still applies. I think you've got to go through that planning process like: what's our situation, what's our objectives, who are our audiences, what do we need to say to them. And then how are we going to get those words out and how are we going to get that message out. And then how are we going to monitor the situation and how will we know we're effective. All those kind of tried and true communications planning elements are still very much for me in a crisis situation. Even if you do it in like five minutes. Which sometimes that's how fast you have to move.</p> <p>I think a communications person needs to not be in the thick of it. You have to be a little bit removed because of a lot of emotion, and there could be a danger there... could be sadness there, could be disbelief, Whatever the situation might be. You have to kind of be a little bit outside of it and looking at it objectively and essentially be a couple steps ahead of everybody else in the situation.</p> <p>I'm thinking some of the other interesting crazy situations we've had that we've heard can happen with banking organizations or organizations where they had a compromise. And getting that word out to the key audiences is critical. And obviously employees are very essential. We typically would give employees talking points if asked here's how to respond to this, in addition to direct customer letter, and that kind of thing. But then have a media standby statement.</p>

R11:	I guess most of my experiences with the crisis have been you know retail, banking situations like that where there is a direct interface with customers. I guess that's a different situation than maybe you know manufacturing setting or to a university or something like.
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Q4: What communication channels were used during the crisis?	
R1:	<p>So the normal communications channels still were in place. They tended to be populated with a lot of strike related information. So, for example, each hospital and each major location of [NAME OF COMPANY] has a weekly electronic newsletter. Our CEO [NAME OF CEO] sends out an e-mail every Friday to all leaders within [NAME OF COMPANY] three Fridays a month, and on the first Friday of the month she sends it to all of [NAME OF COMPANY], not just leaders. So that's continued. We have an intranet site that is sort of an internal news document repository and that was still there. So we tended to just use our normal channels.</p> <p>The special channel that we created... it was this sort of negotiation news channel. But other than that, we wanted to use our normal channels and just you know this was the topic for a lot of it, but not all of it. I mean we also wanted to demonstrate that while this is a big deal life goes on and there are other things happening and you know we're still taking care of patients. So a lot of that kind of content that we would normally have continued as well.</p>
R2:	<p>In an organization our size, the notion of reaching everybody ever really is zero. It's an implausible process. Your goal is obviously to reach as many people as you can, and more importantly your goal is to reach as many opinion makers as you can. Using our company, what you really want to do is hit the GMs, the general managers. Within a store, the GM is the field general. Within the store, the general manager is the CEO. And the people look to him or her for advice, and guidance, and input, and consolation. All the things that you look to from a boss. There's a relationship there they can go beyond simply employee/employer. These are confidants, and aides, and helpers, and they are trusted. And so if you can inform them well, at a minimum, and get them to believe what you believe then you have a really powerful ally.</p> <p>In many respects, your job in communicating internally will be more easy than if you attempted to get to everybody directly. Even if you could, you would still probably be better off having the GM be well informed and passionate, and having him carrying the message than having you trying to carry it yourself all the way down.</p>

R2:	<p>As an example, every company, every size will have opinion makers. If you work for a company that has 400 people, there are 400 people sitting at their desks. I think you have a very good shot at having everybody reading what you send. But the secondary component of your communications would be... first it would be send to everyone. The second would be to pull aside the key 10 or 20 opinion makers, give them a deeper briefing, bring them into the CEO's office and let them ask their questions, let them come out as advocates and early adapter employees and let them do their thing.</p>
R3:	<p>So I would say the post crisis is... for example, we only use text messaging when there is a serious, a broad campus risk. We have made a very strict decision that we are not going to use text messaging to update people about an event. Because if it's not a unique way of communicating, the people will quickly overlook it. People know now that if they get a text message from the University they need to pay attention because their safety may be at risk. So that when we don't make any exceptions about.</p> <p>Social media, in the moment of a crisis, becomes only focused on the crisis or frankly if it is not communicating about the crisis it will off and go dark. We are very careful not to post a look at the beautiful spring campus photo when there is also a racial issue going on. Because it makes us look like we're just on Mars by ourselves and not paying attention. So even the communication around the crisis communication itself is monitored and tweaked so it is appropriate.</p> <p>Post crisis obviously is less time sensitive. So we're relying a lot more on things like e-mails, press releases, and newsletters that are already going out. So it might be adding a story or an update to the, for example we have something called Brief which is kind of the internal employee, faculty newsletter that goes out once a week by email. We have an undergraduate and graduate student email newsletters that go out every couple of weeks. So the updates post crisis will most often go in those as opposed to sending a campus-wide specific email.</p> <p>People around here get really annoyed at the amount of email that is sent. So we trying to use that sparingly. And utilize then the already made communications opportunities for those things that don't have the time sensitivity.</p>

Q5: What channels are used for routine internal communications?	
R4:	<p>We've got a few primary channels. One, we gave a quarterly staff meeting. We have an intranet site which is kind of like our news engine, and we still do a lot of communicating via e-mail. And we also have a quarterly leadership meeting for all people, leaders. And then the departments typically have their own quarterly meetings as well.</p> <p>[How does that work for those that aren't in the main office? How do those meetings work?]</p> <p>We have WebEx and Telepresence. So we do have that capability. Many people don't use those capabilities. But we do have that capability for people to use the camera on their laptop so that they can be visible remotely. Otherwise we use a lot of presentations or other kinds of mechanisms for sharing information. So like for example, for our all-staff we have the capability to show the presenter and the slides. So we do that combination for the all-staff. I think typically for departments that are doing their meetings they're not necessarily showing up the presenter but they would be showing the slides.</p> <p>[Do you think those channels are effective?]</p> <p>I would say yes and no. People are good about submitting questions via WebEx. Our intranet site which is visible to all of our employees it is pretty dated in its functionality so we don't have a great mechanism on the intranet site for comments, or ratings, or any kind of real-time dialogue. So that is definitely an opportunity. We still do a lot of surveys in our organization, and we don't have as many real-time, sort of interactive dialogue options.</p>
R5:	<p>I hate buzzwords, but the whole buzzword "cascading messages" and all of that. We have to do it better. We have to do it so much better. When you look at the way people, employees want to get their information, the research that I've read says they want to hear it from the top. They want to hear it regularly from their leader, the CEO. They want to hear directly from their supervisor. And I think it's the CEO because they want to know the company is ok. They want to know what's he thinking. And they want to hear it from him for just confidence. They want to hear it from their supervisor because they got a more personal relationship with that person. Right? They're going to be at a level of candor. There's just a connection difference. So when that supervisor shares it, they go a little further into the details or how it impacts that individual. And they also want to hear it from other people around them.</p>

R5:	<p>So we've tried to use that model and be like, [NAME OF CEO] is going to share it. But before the announcement, we'll share it with the key supervisors. And try to give them enough time that they can process it, so they can say, 'I get how this is going to affect our group. I can answer their questions.' And as it gets shared, we're hoping that it be in a way that employees start talking about it.</p> <p>We have an internal web site which we're hoping will become more valuable over time. Right now it's just stagnant. It's a website. It's the same if you went on. It's the same if I went on. It will become user specific at some point. So it will be more stories that you're interested in reading and seeing. And you can subscribe to feeds and it'll just be populated with whatever you're looking for as an employee. The hope is that if you wanted to go find more information, I could go here for information. I could go there. It's just the surround sound approach. How many ways can we share information with people so that they hear it a couple of times and it really starts to kind of resonate and sink in.</p>
R8:	<p>Yeah again it's externally facing but we do have an eye on to our internal employees, those who are in the stations. You know again through the employee newsletter. [NAME], who's also chief engineer, will send out one or two e-mails to all employees thanking them for their work during the... and this will be like in the middle of the snow season. We share when we can e-mails from the public. We do kind of censor them. But we try to include that kind of information as well and include again in the newsletter. So between the newsletter and emails, we do that.</p> <p>But I think the nature of internal communication is also changing because you know a lot of people are on social media and we've really beefed up our social media. Not that we can expect all 5,000 of our employees to be following us on Twitter or Facebook. But we've kind of promoting from an external point of view, we've been featuring our drivers on Facebook posts like "Meet Joe." From all around the state. And anecdotally we think that that has actually improved our PR with the public. It seems like we've gotten fewer negative comments. There's always that those out there. But you know once they put a face to somebody who's in the plow, who's doing the road kind of thing. So we share these also with our employees. So you know kind of keeps them involved.</p>

Q6: Was face-to-face-communications used during the crisis? Do you routinely use face-to-face communication as a channel within your organization?	
R1:	<p>It's not easy for face-to-face on a grand scale across [NAME OF COMPANY]. However, face-to-face communication is still very important. And so at the end, the individual hospitals and the hospital presidents have their quarterly town hall meetings... where they have to have a lot of them too because we have a lot of employees and you can't take everyone off the floor at once to go hear a speech. So you've got to have... in some cases we have 30 or more sessions. Some, a fair number of which, are in the middle of the night for the night shift. So yes, that still happened. And even beyond that, that is still like a couple of hundred people coming into an auditorium and listening to the president speak.</p> <p>But even beyond that, the leader, sort of front line leaders and their staffs, we did provide them... and you know part of the point of negotiation news... was to provide those kinds of leaders clear information that they could deliver to their employees. So an employee would come up to their boss and say 'what's really going on here?' That boss would be equipped to have a message to deliver on that.</p> <p>I'm glad you asked about that because that certainly was really important, and because so much of this became so emotional, those kinds of personal one-on-one trusting relationships that we always try to cultivate became really, really important. So we wanted to make sure that leaders did not kind of retreat and shy away from having conversations about this topic because it was just too difficult or too toxic of a topic to touch. And we tried to do everything we could to help them feel confident in having those conversations and indeed encourage them to do it.</p>
R3:	<p>I don't think it's utilized enough. I think we should do more of it. I think our leadership should... easy for more to say. They should be in fewer meetings and they should be out communicating with the campus, even outside of a crisis more often. I would love it if we could, the president's calendar for example is so swamped right now. And it's always swamped. And when he first started as president, he would actually schedule time to walk and just mingle with students or to drop in on a department of faculty and just have a conversation. I would like to see us do more of that.</p> <p>And again it's kind of that relationship building theme. I think if we did more outside of the crisis, we would have more Capital to spend in a crisis. But we tend to, as an organization, we tend to lean on things like email because they are easier and you can do it faster and it's less confrontational. At least for the leader. I actually don't think it leads to less confrontation on campus. And I think we hide</p>

R3:	<p>behind the electronic communication now more than we should. I think it would go a long way in a crisis if... and we do this sometimes. But if the president or vice president would say we're going to have a campus forum this afternoon. And just have a discussion about what's going on.</p> <p>Again, the emergency situation is a little different. I think very much there would be face to face the way of a press conference or perhaps a faculty meeting or something like that. But we tend to lean towards the electronic. And I think it's a detriment sometimes.</p>
R9:	<p>But let's go back to the organization that's trying to be a much more collaborative and inclusive... how decisions are arrived at. One of the key issues is, because it's an enormous organization, there's a tendency to want to just go to something quick and easy like e-mail. Well e-mail has its strengths but it also has its weaknesses.</p> <p>And so part this outfit is slated to have town halls in various parts of the organization. People are free to come in here to listen in and offer questions and a point of view. And those have been in and of itself have been extraordinary because they were contrary... just that was not done under the old leadership. In a crisis, the actions are taking the messages they're conveying and how you're conveying them can really help reinforce your approach to resolve the crisis.</p> <p>I think that the other challenge with e-mail is that it just gets quickly distributed to anybody and everybody and there are times that can work to your advantage and other times where it doesn't.</p>
R11:	<p>The old rule of thumb is face-to-face is always best whenever possible. The bigger the organization, the more challenging that is. I know we've designed communication rollouts with manufacturing companies where there's multiple shifts and multiple location. Once spent the whole weekend planning a communications rollout. You end up with multiple, multiple locations worldwide and we had a big schedule of how we're going to roll the news out in a way that made sense. In a smaller organization, just pulling a team together with a direct supervisors, they have a script or talking points. It really is that is the ideal. If you can't have that, how close can we get to that? You know companies will do joint meeting, video-sharing, teleconferences. We just recently completed working with [NAME OF COMPANY] which is a great big international retailer and we were kind of on that path. We did internal communications for that. We were kind of in a hurry. But I believe they do a lot of email and then they have a whole communications system with stores. I think for a company that size they really can't do a face-to-face rollout as much as they would like. So it's too big.</p>

Q7: Who was involved in the crisis communications planning and execution?	
R1:	<p>I can tell you but it's not the sort of a clear representation. So the way Allina Health Marketing and Communications is, it's a system-wide function so there is one big team. Some of which is here at corporate headquarters but many of which are deployed out to the hospitals. So the people working on the strike sort of very intensely it was actually fairly limited. I mean there's probably like six people from my team. If you look at my team at large across the system both here and are deployed out in locations, you know it's more like 50 people. Twelve of those are graphic designers. Three of them are web people. So those are folks that weren't necessarily directly involved.</p>
R2:	<p>So you start at the top generally with the board. In a CEO change, obviously the board is responsible for that at the time. Then you go to the CEO. Typically, the chief communications officer and his staff would be involved. Often the HR people will get involved either because they have subject-matter expertise or they're influential in the company, or they're simply a good sounding board.</p> <p>And then depending on the company, it could easily be people who have the majority of employees. There's always in the company one or two people you look at in the org chart and you say the bulk of the people work for them. In our case, it would be head of our stores, head of retail. Of the 125,000, about 120,000 of them work for retail. So there is specific need, tempo, pace, content for that audience. It's very different from a corporate audience. We want to very much take into account what those people needed and wanted, in addition to the corporate response.</p>
R5:	<p>When it comes to planning, kind of our communications response, I wish I could tell you it was more people than just a few. But it was, in most case, our CEO, our CFO that are sitting at the table, our legal counsel, our chief legal officer is really involved, and then it would be my boss who leads enterprise marketing and communications, myself, and a handful of others depending on kind of the business. So we're keeping it pretty high level right now.</p> <p>And then as we get everything built, like the communications plan or the messages, then it goes down to my team that helps me to build out everything. Or frankly, we're not big enough that my hands get dirty very often. So it's time to do a lot of writing. But that's the group that would guide more of the like strategic kind of direction of how we handle some things.</p> <p>I'm very fortunate. The brand new CEO is somebody I've worked with in energy. He's very focused on transparency and candor, and he is very engaged in how we are sharing the message. Which we had a great leader before that, but nothing</p>

R5:	<p>like this. So he's more hands on than what we've had in the past. For me that's exciting. But maybe more so than some other CEOs would. But this is literally his first 30 days in. So he wants to make sure he's actively being a part of all of it.</p> <p>On most situations, we're probably looking at 10 people to a dozen, somewhere in that neighborhood of people that are key in making the strategy and deciding the strategy. But an interesting perspective, and I'm sure you probably have heard this many places, is comms will drive the conversation. So as you're building a communications plan and you're contemplating strategy, I'm the one writing the initial plan. And then we get it in a room and we hash it out.</p> <p>I always thought it's interesting, especially in crisis and issues, is that I feel like there's... we're thinking of the questions. Just like we were in media. Right? What questions are people asking? What do we need to have answers to? And as we do that, it sometimes guides decision making for the business or decision making for the CEO. I'm sure I'm not the first person that's shared that. But there are times where you kind of go, 'should I be directing it like this?' But it's you know it's an issue. You know it's something that has to be resolved and you kind of flag it and those folks take it and make the decision and then you communicate it.</p> <p>There are situations where a mistake was made. You know, you have to deal with it. Thankfully we're a great organization where we don't have too many things to deal with. Regulatory issues and those kinds of things. There's always the occasional employee that makes bad judgment calls. And then there's always a situation where, what we do is dangerous work. Farming is not safe. So we have to make sure safety is constantly a priority. But we do occasionally have incidents where people get hurt. Which is never what we want. But we have to figure out how to communicate that and share that sometimes.</p>
R6:	<p>There are four organizations in the pork industry who have all agreed to work hand in hand in a time of crisis. And my responsibility is to coordinate those on the crisis teams from those four organizations including the crisis team from the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]. So we all work as one unified response. But then within that we break out into a number of different audiences: producers obviously is one of those audiences. When we talk about internal we're talking about staff of our associations and those people who are going to make things happen for various external audiences like customers, and consumers, and packers, and producers, and media, and all the different audiences.</p> <p>Our crisis team is comprised of the crisis response coordinator. Someone who is responsible for leadership. Someone responsible for media. Someone responsible for consumer communication. Someone for packer and sustainability communications. Someone for channel marketing. Someone for retail marketing.</p>

R6:	<p>Science and technology. USDA and government. And USDA relations and legal counsel. Human resources and compliance. Producer and state associations. Export and foreign market. Social media. Internal communications, which would be staff who are not involved in the crisis. Media monitoring. Information technology. Technical communications. Producer's services. Specialized communications. Buildings and facility resource allocations. And then administrative and logistics.</p> <p>So I'm responsible for making sure all of these teams, which are two people teams, know what's up and know what the plan is and that we first that we have a plan and that we know what the plan is and then we march forward and deliver on that plan. And then within each of these teams... we have two people on each team. The team leader and the assistant. And the assistant has the same, or alternate, I should not say assistant, has in this case the same authority to make decisions from a financial standpoint, from a resource management standpoint, from any actions that would be need to be taken with our audience as a team lead.</p>
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Q8: How long was the organization dealing with the crisis?	
R1:	<p>That's a good question because, I mean, if you think about it we were preparing for that possibility since really the beginning of the year in 2016. Knowing that 2016 was a negotiation year, which comes up every three years and knowing that there were some things we wanted to try to achieve in this round of negotiations that were going to be difficult, we knew that a strike was a distinct possibility. So we began planning for that very early in the year. While we did that, we were also sort of managing communications through the negotiation process. So around about March of 2016, we actually started negotiating with the nurses' union and there was a lot of communications, internal communications, that needed to happen relative to that. Which I wouldn't call a crisis at that point, but which were sort of the pre-crisis knowing that it could become a crisis. So you sort of think of it in a similar way.</p> <p>So at [NAME OF COMPANY], one of our norms is to try to be as transparent in our communications as possible and I think there are a lot of good reasons for that. One of which is, in the case of labor negotiations, it's important for us to try to be as clear to the employees who are represented by the union as possible as to what [NAME OF COMPANY]'s position in the negotiations is. Because if we don't tell... if we don't communicate to our nurses what we're putting on the table and why we think it's fair, they are left with nothing to go on other than union</p>

R1:	<p>communications and what the union is telling them... about how terrible what we're putting on the table is and how it's not fair. So it kind of gets crisisy in that space even before the strike because it can devolve into a sort of he said she said kind of situation. So we've worked hard to make sure that our communications are sort of fact... you know, completely factual. Not sort of ramped up emotional rhetoric which the Union tends to use. They tend to try to stir emotions by throwing fire bombs, and we tend to try to be a little bit more cool and detached and present sort of just the facts approach. So that really... we did that throughout March, April, May as negotiations went on. As it became clear that the negotiations were not going well, you know there was a lot of internal discussion around the role communications could potentially play in helping the negotiations along. So, there was a lot of robust discussion within the organization about how... how directly we should take on the union. How, you know, should we say that the union is lying to you. You know, because in some cases that was, that was happening. But at the same time we, you know, saying things like that sort of ratchets up the emotion and can lead to more of a separation than a coming together. So, there is an ongoing way that you manage that.</p> <p>Once the strike actually started, everything changes because you can't even really communicate with the nurses who are on strike. You know, when they're your employees you can send them e-mails, they have access to all of our communications channels internally. When they're on strike their email is cut off, their access to our intranet is cut off. So, we don't have a way to reach them. We still have ways to reach everyone else. And because this became such a media story, there is, you know, obviously great interest internally as to how this is going to get resolved. What the plan is. And then, not to mention, you know, the external crisis communication that went along with it was sort of relentless and ongoing. I mean it was literally a pretty much a 24 hour a day, seven-eight weeks thing. Because in a situation like that with a union, they treated it very much like they're at war with you and they're constantly trying to get at you. Poking you from a variety of directions. They were staging demonstrations outside of the businesses of our board members. So it became a much bigger community issue than just us. And it was really important as we went along to sort of maintain a sense of.... being sticking to our purpose, consistency of message, and persistence in approach to say we understand this is getting difficult but we still believe that our ultimate goal which was a fair contract not only fair to the nurses but fair to everyone else in the organization. So that the nurses aren't getting the special deal that they've got for years, necessarily. You know, being completely focused on that objective and trying to make the communications reflect that was something we thought about every day.</p>
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R2:	<p>The first year and a half was one long crises. Between the declining stock price, declining business, a takeover bid from the founder, a CEO transition, and a well-publicized turnaround that any moment could result in people losing their jobs. We took about a billion and a half dollars out of the company. That causes an astonishingly, but understandable, an astonishingly amount of internal churn and major concern which is one long crisis. In many respects, it's a very debilitating crisis because it does last so long and it is filled with so much uncertainty.</p> <p>In some respects, a crisis in which something bad happens and we all know it, like an airplane crash, it has a relatively defined period and some defined parameters. A company going through the trouble like we were... no one really knew how it was going to end when it started and no one knew how long it was going to last. And that's incredibly debilitating.</p>
R7:	<p>I think the investigation took about 18 months. I would say that probably for, certainly through the investigation, there was some aspect of the organization... like any large organization that has a lot of individuals and individual offices and one that is spread out geographically. If you look at this map you can see these numbers. Well these are the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] districts. And there's a headquarters in each district and they have their own thing. Well the collapse occurred here. Now it had some statewide impact in terms of reputation, in terms of media, and so on. But really it mostly affected the folks here. These folks still have their work to do. These folks. These folks. We went through winter. We had to plow snow. All of that.</p> <p>So there were some places that were in crisis, might still be to some degree. When I get calls, I feel like it's not a comfortable thing to have to answer and respond to questions about the collapse. But for the agency as a whole probably couple years.</p>

Q9: Do you feel the internal communications during the crisis was effective?	
R1:	<p>I do. I mean, I think it was... I will say that we weren't able to necessarily convince hard core union supporters that the union's position was wrong and ours was right. I don't think we ever really had a chance at doing that. But I will say... I'm very proud of the way that we didn't sort of crouch in a corner and wait for the storm to pass but rather we were proactively communicating as much as possible. And I think that's a really important sort of principle of all internal communications, but particularly in a crisis. If there's a vacuum of information, people will fill it in with who knows what. And so it's really important to have reliable consistent communications throughout the crisis.</p>

R1:	<p>One of the other sort of maxims you'll hear in crisis communication is let your employees know before something appears in the media. And that is certainly something that we try to do as well. It's a strange way... it's almost easier to do in these surprise one off crises because it just sort of one day stories. But in the end, the strike is sort of in the media literally every single day. And at first there was some notion of trying to alert employees that there will be a story on Channel 5 tonight. But it quickly became clear that there was a story on every news channel and in the newspaper every single day. So telling people that, became sort of irrelevant.</p> <p>There are literally some crises that start and finish in three hours. If that's the case, you have no communications taking place... there's not much you can do except hold on tight. But in a crisis that has a day or two, or a week or a month, or even a year... anything beyond 48 hours, then yes, absolutely.</p> <p>It starts with your executive team. Often, crises are handled by a very small number of people. You'd be surprised at how often whole executive team usually isn't as well informed as you'd expect it to be. Because they are not in the room. So make sure your team knows what is going on because they are looked to as obviously people in the know. They hate to not be in the know. So you're undermining them. It may not seem like the wisest use of time in the moment... as you well know, you're not usually just dealing with an internal crisis. You're dealing with an external crisis too. And so your time is really split. But if you can say to yourself, in this crisis I'm going to handle it 50/50 internal and external. Of the 50, you're going to communicating broadly and then identifying key constituents to communicate with them as often as you can.</p> <p>When I went to airplane crashes, I spent a substantial portion of my time dealing externally with the media. But once the victims' families arrived on scene, I was meeting with them, literally, as much as I could or as much as I was with external. And that was the equivalent of internal communication and the reasons for that are twofold. One, it is the right thing to do. But second, just like in a company, if the victims' families are not well informed, they will go find somebody who will inform them. Even if it's the media. And you know sometimes the information they get won't be as good. Sometimes their complaints will be unfair. But no matter what the circumstances are, if you think of it as the internal communications equivalent, you now have a critical internal constituency that is not as well informed as it can be and therefore feel as well cared for. That's a pretty dangerous combination.</p>
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R4:	<p>I would say they were mostly effective. We did get feedback that people appreciated the transparency. I think we definitely had people who wanted more information than we were able to give them. And I think part of the difficulty was in... because we had to move quickly because we were really evaluating things very fast, there were definitely a number of folks who felt very shell shocked, that this was not at all in their picture of what was even possible working for the organization. So I would say they were mostly effective, but given the seriousness and the difficulty of the topic, I wouldn't say that by any means that everyone was satisfied with the communication. I think they really wanted more detail than we were able to give. It's an organization of folks who largely have a high need to know. And I think they were looking for a level of detail and also maybe desiring a little bit more straightforward answer. And because we were moving quickly and because it was a complicated situation, I think that you know the messaging was in some ways unsatisfying because it wasn't just you know this simple easy to understand set of reasons for why certain areas were impacted.</p>
R5:	<p>So the honest answer is, I think it depends on who you ask. If you ask our leadership team, they would say yes. They were happy it. If you ask me, I am never pleased. I think there is always more that could have been done. Given the time we had, we probably got a B-. I'd much rather have done more. I think our CEO, the leader of our group would have given us an A. Again I go back to those folks that are not located at headquarters. I just don't think that we do enough to make they're getting what they need. We did some employee surveys. We do employee surveys almost every year. Some of what we've heard, which you'd expect, is that those employees that don't have e-mail addresses or aren't located at a location of 50 people or more, they just feel more disconnected. So how do you try to offset that? Because those people are also the people that are more likely having customer interactions. Because they're out there talking with farmers. They are in the elevator filling loads. So with those folks having such an important role locally, I just want to make sure they feel as connected as they can. And that just might be connected to their location. And that is ok. But they should feel like they are not being left out.</p>
R8:	<p>I don't think we get a lot of feedback. We didn't do any surveys or anything about it. We were dealing with the... So we try to keep internal employees informed. But we were also dealing with the media and were overwhelmed by local and national and international requests in the initial days. But then the local media persisted. We had hundreds of data practices requests that required a tremendous amount of response. And so we didn't do a lot of circling back. But people out here aren't shy. You know if they need it they will...</p>

Q10: Do you believe the employees trusted what the organization was telling them during the crisis?

R1: I think it does sort of fall along the lines. I mean, those lines were sort of fairly clearly drawn between the nurses, the unionized nurses, and everyone else. Because if you recall again, kind of what the main thing we were disputing about was health insurance. And the nurses have a very rich health insurance plan that's been in place for over two decades. It's very expensive for the organization and it is like health insurance that nobody else in the organization has. And so the nurses' narrative was that, 'we want to strip that away and give them so-called crappy health insurance.' Well that's the same health insurance that all the rest of us have, that so-called crappy health insurance. So to the extent that everyone else would kind of look at that and say 'wow, I don't think it's so crappy.' I think people who understood that believed what we were saying because that's essentially all we were saying, and it's sort of like don't take our word for it, look at your plan. There was at one point, and this was something we worked hard to achieve, we were really 'look, it really came down to this thing.' Nurses say the health insurance is crappy. We say it's not. And to try to explain why it is or isn't you very quickly get into sort of the arcane of health insurance benefits. It's difficult to understand. And so at one point there was what we thought was a great story where they actually took the plan that the nurses are on and the plan we wanted to move them to and got an independent third party insurance evaluator to look at them and they did a story that basically said, 'while the nurse Allina plan is in fact richer, but the other plan is really, really very good.' It's sort of at or above all industry standards. As good as almost anyone has these days. And when that story appeared it was great from our public perception, but we also really hammer that thing internally. We made sure that the link to that story was pushed throughout the organization so that everyone could hear it.

And so that's an example of the melding of internal and external communications and how you can use what's going on externally as a tool internally. And I think once that story was broadcast our credibility was enhanced even more. And you know what I what I would like to see, and I don't know when or if this will ever happen, you know what we settled on was this sort of multi-year transition into the new health insurance. So it's probably too early. Here we are a year later and most of the nurses still haven't switched because we gave them like a three year runway. But at some point they will have switched. And at that point I'd love for an external media source to go back and say you know all those disaster scenarios that you were saying would happen if you had to switch whatever happened. And I think we'll find if anyone were to ask that it turned out to be just fine.

R4:	They do. I think starting with the CEO for the state the state kind of approach was very different than the way we've handled other large changes in the past. It was much more transparent and there is, I would say, a trusted relationship with the CEO. So the fact that he was coming forward and sort of sharing this direction with people I think felt more confident in the validity of the information. I think at the same time, although they trusted the information they were getting was accurate, they may have questioned if was complete. Again, they wanted more detail than was really, really possible.
R5:	<p>No. Not at all. Now, more recently, I think yes. Because there was a big shift in tone. Having worked with [NAME OF CEO] for a few years prior to this, I knew how he talked. So that really helped. He's just very different. It's like you're sitting across from him. That's how he communicates. Versus the old CEO. That was a big shift. We went from privately traded to publicly traded. And then legal got involved. And I think all of that reduced trust with our owners and trust with our employees.</p> <p>That that's what we're trying to... not really go above and beyond and not to overkill. But we're trying to just show that it's a different day. Just by making some subtle changes in how we're sharing things and how we're talking about things. So, I would say a month ago it wasn't good at all. But now better.</p>
R10:	We see it [a failure in trust] all the time. It's called social media. If you don't talk to your people, they're telling your story. If you don't get to them, they're on Twitter. They're on Facebook. They're talking about what the problem is. Customers? Same way. 'How come I was last to know?' We see it.

Q11: How do you ensure that employees trust the internal messages coming from the organization?	
R1:	<p>I think that the best way to do that is to be consistent with your message and as transparent as possible so that it doesn't appear that you are hiding anything and that you're not changing your story as the crisis unfolds.</p> <p>So in health care, there are a lot of privacy regulations and there's a lot of times where you can't get the level of detail you might want to because of patient privacy and things like that. And I think people, the audience, understands that as well, but as long as you're consistently open and consistent in your story I think that that goes a long way to building trust.</p> <p>You know people are fairly understanding that bad things can happen and where trust gets eroded is not because the bad thing happened, it was because how you</p>

R1:	<p>responded to it. Did you try to cover it up or did you try to minimize it? Did you hope no one would notice it and not say anything? You know that's the way to erode trust. Doing the opposite of that is the way to build trust. So I like to think that as hard as the strike was we built some credibility with our employees generally by the way we approached it.</p>
R2:	<p>I've always believed there's a couple of really specific moments in which trust is won or lost. The first is, you never sound like you're lying. So by that I mean, the classic, 'well, you know, it's unclear exactly what happened?' Or, 'we're studying that. We'll get back to you.' It's fair to say, 'look, we don't have all the facts. But here's what we know.' What would be unfair or what would be suggestive of you're full of shit, is something less than that. So simply the way in which you sound can make all the difference. And that's a still defined concept. But I think we all know it when we see it.</p> <p>If I was preparing you to go before a large audience to persuade them that you were telling them the truth in time of crisis, we were practice the hardest questions. And not practice them from a content perspective. But rather, how are you saying it and what are you looking like? What is the manner you are using to project? The lawyers will tell you what you can and can't say. But what is the human answer? That is the hard alchemy. But boy, we know it when we hear it. And that's your job as a communicator is to say to the CEO, 'that's not a human answer. Let's try again.' So the way you sound and appear is the first thing.</p> <p>The second is, the candor with which you speak. So we are as leaders hesitant to admit when we don't know things. But a core element of a communications internally or externally is not get ahead of the facts and to say, 'look, we don't know. We're running as fast as we can figure this out. But we don't know.' And the second part is not just, 'we don't know,' But 'why we don't know....' 'Mr. Furman, how many stores are you closing?' What you don't understand is that we have three different kinds of stores in four different countries. And when you ask me "store," I'm not entirely sure what you mean. So define what you mean before I can answer your question. As opposed to, 'oh, we don't have that number yet.' 'Come on. You're running the damn thing. How can you not have the number?' It's actually a harder question an you would think. Let me tell you why.</p> <p>Or from my accident... I remember from airplane crashes. They say, 'how many fatalities?' It's very easy. I know how many were on the plan and how many survived, and I do the math. You go to a train accident, an Amtrak accident, they don't have a manifest. They don't know who's on the train. Before 9/11, they didn't check tickets until halfway through the train ride sometimes. You could be on the train an hour before someone would come along. So depending on when</p>

R2:	<p>that train derailed or had an accident, they had a rough number. They knew it was somewhere between two hundred and 250. But they couldn't give me the number. I go before media that we used to covering airplane crashes and I had to say to them, 'we don't know how many fatalities.' 'How many people were on the train?' 'We don't know.' You should have heard the screams of, 'Furman, how full of shit can you be?' And I had to walk them through it. Once I did, they understood it. Another lesson I learned in the moment is, don't wait for the follow-up. Actually explain why you don't know. Because it, a: gets you through the moment; and b: it helps you reinforce your credibility.</p> <p>And then finally, what are the elements of trust? You know, you're talking to me not always when I'm asking you to talk to me. It's the friend that calls you to say hello not just when they need something from you. Going before your audience and giving them an update even when you have no update, I now walk away thinking, 'this guy is going to actually tell me what's going on even when nothing is going on. How great is that?'</p>
R5:	<p>I think the most influential to me in whether we're doing ok is conversations with people. Because we are very face-to-face, even though we are big, I wanted feedback. So I reach out regularly to different people. Our whole team does, just to really understand what are people thinking.</p> <p>We do surveys. We look at analytics. We see all that stuff. I just feel like I get better pulse and a better understanding of what people really think when I can talk to a general manager of 600 people. He then hears from his direct reports that say, 'man, people are miffed about this. Or they're really excited about this.' The most recent I've heard is, 'wow, it feel like we've had a tide change in a good way. This is just a different day.' And that's exactly how we've been trying to set up this CEO change. We had a great chapter, but now we have a new chapter. This is how we're moving forward. You can pull out all your analytics, but for me the most valuable is really just getting the direct feedback from different groups.</p>
R9:	<p>Well a lot of it has to do with the groundwork that was laid before the event and circumstance. Because if folks have felt distrustful or alienated, then they are going to be a little apprehensive about accepting what you have to say. One of the ways to get at it, honestly, is just candor. 'We screwed up. We didn't live our values. We allowed 'x' to drive our decision making and that's contrary to what we had been.'</p> <p>There are things when legally you may not be able to share. And I think there are times when it's our job to have a very difficult conversation with the lawyers in the room who are tending to want to squeeze our actions and statements to vanilla, to nothingness. Part of coming to some consensus is asking the question, 'so if</p>

R9:	<p>you're afraid of a lawsuit, if you're thinking that by saying nothing or saying little will prevent a lawsuit, do you honestly think that it's going to prevent a lawsuit?' And they'll say, 'oh, no. We're going have a lawsuit matter what.' So then we ask, 'so where would you rather be? In a position where you basically acted in a manner and made statements in a manner that really didn't convey the urgency of the situation and your commitment to addressing the situation? Would that not help you with the jury or the judge? Just being disengaged or conveying a perception of disengagement, where would that leave you?'</p> <p>It's that same sort of thing about you don't want a hospital to apologize for making a medical error. Well, I think hospitals have learned that the more swifter that they sit down with families and apologize, the less likely they are to be sued. Or if they are, the outcome is a different one.</p> <p>So again with employees, when you consider... what do you need in a crisis as an organization, as leadership? You need, especially if it's a very difficult one, you need the benefit of the doubt. And employees can really help you there. They're out in the community. They can address questions. They can make statements to their neighbors. You have sales reps out there. The Department of Agriculture, you have field people out there who can be ready to say, 'what I'm hearing is a little different.' And they can be able to neutralize it. But again, those statements truly need to be backed by actions that are going to score, that are going to resonate.</p>
R10:	<p>If you're not genuine, your people are going to see through it. You have to trust your people. And by communicating with them, it sends a signal to them that we respect you enough. We hold you in high enough esteem that you're our first audience and that does build trust. They can be mad as hell you and say, 'well, why did you guys do this? How could you let this happen?' But at least once they get over it, they are in the same room talking to you or you're communicating with them.</p> <p>If you're the last one to know and if it's something intimately important to you, you feel betrayed. Think about your own personal life. Everything in business we can relate to our personal lives. If you have a family situation, you want to hear from your family. I don't read in the newspaper that such and such a kid did such and such a thing. Or I don't want to hear on the outside world that something happened involving my company. 'Oh great! Your brother was running for governor? Isn't that nice.' You don't want to see that the Star Tribune. You want to hear from your brother. And that's the same mindset. We take it very, very seriously.</p>

R10:	<p>And the other thing is, you need your employees. You keep to running business. If they get good, clean, accurate information, or as best as they can they can, they can continue to run the business. And that's one of the big mistakes that we see people make in companies of all sizes. They get so focused on the crisis they forget to fly the airplane. They forget to run the business. And you have a crisis team that's going to handle the issue. So if you get it off your chest, talk to your people, communicate with them... And one of the key messages is, 'we value what you do. And one of the things you do is to create a good product, take care of your patients. Teach your kids.' Whatever it is that they do, reinforce that. Tell them to keep doing it. Because if you don't, now you in a second crisis. You lose sales. You lose customer base.</p> <p>The only way you can get over any kind of problem is if you have trust. And if you don't have trust, no matter what you say, no matter what you do, it's always viewed as coming with a tag. You're coming with an ulterior motive. You just have to trust. And they have to trust you and the best way for your people to trust you in a crisis internally is to keep communicating with them. Let them know they're important. You know, we talk about audiences and key key stakeholders. If you're employees, your internal people, aren't number one, you're done. You're done. You have no chance.</p> <p>You know when I was an investigative reporter I would only call business leaders to invite them to their own funeral because I already had the story. And I got it from where? The employees. People provided me records. They gave me photographs or they gave me stories. They gave me reports and that's because they didn't trust their leadership is doing anything to address problems.</p>
R11:	<p>I think building trust with employees is a long-term process and an organization that enjoys that kind of trust with employees has been working on it for a long time. And you know the way to build trust is to be consistent between what you say you're all about and what you do. And if you have disharmony, or you get disharmony between those espoused cultural values and what the company actually does, that's going to build cynicism and distrust.</p> <p>I used to say that whenever there was an employee survey done in the organization, that if employees were upset about anything they would say, 'communication sucks around here.' Even though maybe it really didn't. They just didn't care for... there was a disconnect between the stated values and the actual actions of the company or the management.</p> <p>I think it's very important to just be able to state the facts. 'This is what happened and this is what we're doing about it. This is how we will keep you informed. If you have any questions...' Sometimes we would have a vehicle for employees to ask</p>

R11:	questions anonymously and then have a way to respond to all the questions. Particularly in a kind of a change scenario. Then you could have some kind of a vehicle for employees to ask questions or to confidentially get additional information.
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Q12: Do you believe your internal audience felt like they got enough or the right kind of information in the crisis?	
R3:	<p>I think generally, yes. I think no matter how much or little you communicate, you'll hear from some "I want more" or "Stop sending me things." In the crime issue, initially we hesitated to communicate. I think the leadership of the organization... because some of these crimes weren't on campus but many were in the surrounding neighborhood, there was a feeling among leadership that if we communicated a lot about what was going on it would make it our problem when in reality it was the city's police issue.</p> <p>As a communicator, we fought for more communication because our point was, look students who are living in this neighborhood from out of town, in particular, their parents do not distinguish whether something happened on this side of the street or that side. There's a level of responsibility that a higher ed institution has to those families. And I think that means we need to communicate more even when it's not our problem. We need to be talking about what we're doing in cooperation with the agencies in charge to improve things.</p> <p>So in that case, we hesitated to communicate as that issue evolved over time. And we heard from students and faculty and staff and parents who said, 'how can you be silent in the midst of this?' So we ramped up and we communicated very regularly. And then we knew when it was enough because we started hearing from students the other way, 'my god, how many of these emails are you going to send me? Stop!'</p> <p>I think it raises the point that in a crisis it's not just about communicating out, but there's got to be some two-way communication. And that may be as simple as monitoring social media and just making sure that various offices receiving calls and e-mails are funneling them to a central place so you can get a picture of what's going on. I think that at an organization like ours and probably yours, I would suspect, we have a way of getting stuck in a bubble and we think the world around us is reacting a certain way when in reality they're reacting someplace very differently. So that two-way communication and taking the time in a crisis to look at what your stakeholders are saying and doing, and adjusting in the process is really important.</p>

R3:	<p>[How difficult is that?]</p> <p>I think the way you get around that, and I think it's one of the things organizations don't do well in crisis planning is planning according to structure and expertise versus planning based on people. So in a crisis, if you are going to have to monitor social media, it's important that the social media people are on the call list and kind of drop what they're doing and become a central part of the team.</p> <p>So we, for example, work hard with our social media manager to say, 'when there's an issue or when something happens, we need to drop everything, leave your office, come across the hall to our core team, and then you become part of the process. And here is your role in that process. Here's what we're looking for you to do. You need to raise your hand when you're seeing something, either misinformation starting to catch on or people screaming about something.' And so she now knows and often, in fact, and lets us know about issues that she's tracking.</p> <p>Now there's going to come a day where she might be on vacation when a crisis happens, so there's got to be some backup built in. And so it's really about spending the planning time on structure. What are the roles that need to be at the table? Thinking about how you will make decisions in that moment. I think in the urgency sorts of responses, it's very hierarchical. There is someone in charge and everyone in the room knows that person is in charge, and you're funneling information to that person. And then you're leading the tactics that they say. Because that's the most efficient way to do it.</p> <p>In an issue that evolves more over time, you have more room for, kind of, messy discussions. But I think the planning has to really think through and get agreement on here's how going to operate in the crisis.</p> <p>In a true crisis, one that is completely unpredictable and that has the serious possibility of damaging reputation or even changing the direction of an organization if it's not handled well, I think there needs to be a realization by everyone that there's going to be high levels of uncertainty. And that each step you take may not actually solve the crisis. And so as you think about how you make decisions and how you take actions in that way, you're kind of building action upon action upon action. And eventually over time you're going to the end of the crisis. But I think a lot of this is managing expectations for people, including leadership. That, ok, if you action X, Y, and Z, it might work. It might not at all and you may kind of reassess and try something else.</p> <p>And so I think that planning again is about roles in the room, how are you going to operate and make decisions, and then just managing everyone's expectation that</p>
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R3:	you're not going to be perfect. And that all you can ask is people to do their best because... if you look at a situation of like 9/11 for example, I guarantee no one in that equation, as many people as responded to that have, have ever even thought to prepare for that sort of incident. So you use the structure and the things that you have practiced and try to apply it to a new situation. And it's far from perfect. But what else are you going to do, you know. So you practice the things you can and you plan for the things that you can and then hope that people can be adaptable enough in the moment.
R10:	Most organizations are pretty good. Part of it is, is that they feel more comfortable talking to their own people than the real world. So some organizations feel like well our first message has to be to our campus community or employees or our department because that's the most comfortable.

Q13: How much of the communications work during the crisis was focused on internal versus external communications?

R1:	<p>I'd say you can really almost look at it in sort of three buckets. There is the external focus and they tend to be done by different people on the team all working together, of course. But there's the external sort of media relations responding to the media, holding the press conferences, and all that. And that tended to fall a lot of it to me. Then there's the trying to communicate with the nurses directly as much as you can. And we actually... because they didn't have access to our internal channels, we set up a dedicated external web site pointed directly at them so that they could at least have access to what we believed was truthful information. And then there's sort of the communication to everyone else you know. And I'd say that the bulk of the time was spent on the external communications. But close behind was trying to create content for the nurses themselves and a lot of that is useful for both.</p> <p>And we also were very transparent with the media about those resources. We are making investments in nurses. See here it is. You go to the same external web site that we're pointing the nurses to we're also pointing our friends at the media too so they can see we are trying to make our case and lay it out as clearly as possible. Then everyone else, again there was a lot of content related to the strike for them. But a lot of other content too so I'd say that more or less sort of chugged along as normal. So it's really external and just the direct nurse facing that got the vast bulk of the attention from our team.</p>
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R2:	<p>In a real crisis, the pace of external would far exceed the internal. If you're the head of communications in a crisis, you're going to spend more of your communications energy externally than internally and that is probably ok.</p> <p>I use the word communications energy as an important qualifier. If you looked at your full day and say there are 24 hours in a day in a crisis, you're probably going to spend half of that entirely just understanding what's going on. Facts matter more than anything and facts change. And there's good facts and bad facts. And facts that are skewed depending on who you are getting your information from.</p> <p>So really understanding what is going on and then shaping, to the extent you can, decisions that are being made that will either to the benefit or detriment of your organization. It should be the bulk of your time. Because that's where things go on. Your ability to really understand what's going on to be effective, have good communication, and more importantly, influence the decisions that are being made because you know what is going on. That is the bulk of your time.</p> <p>And then when you think of communicating to audiences, the majority then should be externally. Maybe a 70/30 split. But within the 30, there's only so many notes you're going to write from the CEO. Generally you will do one or two and then you're kind of done there. You really want to be doing within your 30 is finding the people that matter, either communicating with them directly or getting the right people to do that. Observing how they're doing, changing course along the way. Giving them coaching and giving them feedback. And really refining your internal message, so you get to a point where your internal audience believes you.</p> <p>The key component of effective internal communications is you're doing it, you're providing the facts that you can. And those facts are being believed. And you know in the era of Trump and fake news, those facts that are believed are not insignificant. It is easy to sort of assume that because you tell an internal audience one thing, they're going to buy what you're selling. I don't think that's the case anymore. I mean it's never really been the case. Introducing the right facts and introducing them in a plausible manner, boy that's important.</p>
R3:	<p>My team is at the center of both. I think it is often important that the same team, especially in a crisis, has got their hands on both. It's not to say that you wouldn't have a team member focused on the internal versus external. But again the consistency of the message has to be there. And I think that also includes tone, even in a crisis. And sometimes the tone can be the most important.</p> <p>You know, if we've got racial issues on campus and we're in the middle of a protest, and we say the right things but no one believes us, it's almost worse than</p>

R3:	<p>saying nothing at all. So you got to have people working very closely together and paying attention not just to the words but who's the spokesperson, who does the message come from. Does that make sense? And is the tone right?</p> <p>I think spokesperson in messenger is also something we think long and hard about in those crises. And I am of the belief that you need to, as a communicator, you need to think about the spokesperson in a kind of tiered way. So often times something bad happens on campus and people will say, ' [NAME OF PRESIDENT] needs to say something.' The problem is if you use the president at the first moment you have nowhere else to go. Unless you want to involve the Board of Regents and often that is not appropriate. So we might suggest, well let's start with the vice president or the Provost. And if this gets really bad that's when you bring the president out. So you have to hold some of your powder dry a little bit.</p> <p>Now if it's a mass shooting, you get to go to the top dog right way. So really part of the team's responsibility is figuring out, how does this crisis or at issue... where does it sit on the spectrum of okay to really bad. And how do you measure who speaks. And how they talk about it. And how frequently or often and in what manner. You know, I think in a true, true crisis, at some point early on, there's got to be face-to-face communication. It might be a press conference where you are putting someone on camera, but you can't use text messages or email to communicate.</p>
R8:	Oh, I'd say it was probably 20/80.

Q14: Were there issues that showed up externally that you then had to respond to internally?	
R1:	<p>Yeah. I think those tended to be the same issue over and over again. And maybe the same two issues with different flavors. There was the issue that, again, the health insurance we were trying to make the employees accepted was bad. And so we kept being as transparent as we could. The message is, 'look at it. It's an open book as to what this plan is. So look at it and make up your mind.' And then again the story was helpful in that regard.</p> <p>The other sort of thing to respond to there was this notion that while the strike was occurring the hospitals became this unsafe... you know cesspool of danger and disruption. I mean that was very much the position that the nurses tried to make which was interesting given that they weren't even inside the hospitals. You know, they're out there on the sidewalk saying this is what's going on. It's like, 'how do you know the names of people?' 'I'm getting calls from inside that it's chaos and these temporary nurses don't know what they're doing and people are</p>

R1:	<p>dying and all this kind of stuff.' So we had to respond to that too internally. Although, interestingly enough the internal communications audience knew that that wasn't true because they were inside and they were seeing it.</p> <p>So we didn't feel the need to sort of you know respond to that in a very aggressive way over and over again because we knew that our folks knew that it wasn't true. We felt the need to respond to that externally. You say, 'not true.' In a situation like this the health department is in our hospitals more or less constantly monitoring things. They found really nothing to be concerned about. There was one medication error that ended up temporarily harming a patient. But I mean honestly that could happen any time. And I think you know we have we have seen nothing that indicates that the care that we provided during the strike was unsafe. Now of course, it's very much in the union's interest to portray it as unsafe. Right? They want to exert community pressure to get us to back down and settle because the community at risk. So that's their narrative. So it was very important for us to counteract that.</p>
R3:	<p>All the time. All the time. Our legislature is very in tune with what the university is doing, particularly in high-profile situations. So I would say managing in athletics crisis at the beginning of or in the middle of a legislative session when we're asking for 600 million dollars is handled more intensely on the government relations side if it would have happened in the middle of July. So political influence is a big issue for us. Legislature and governor in particular. It's one of the things I think that can most often cause us to overreact in in the smaller crises because we're trying to show action and we're trying to be responsive. And sometimes that means we don't take the time to get all the facts right and that comes back to bite us.</p> <p>Students and parents certainly are loud voices, but also faculty. Not even the president of the university get things done on his own. He's got to bring the rest of the campus together. And in such a consultative environment, it can be really hard to manage crisis. Because everyone thinks they have a say, and everyone thinks they should be among the first to be notified. So again, through the relationship building, that's important.</p> <p>We also have day to day mechanisms we have put in to place, something called quick alerts where our news team has a list of, primarily leadership across the university. So everyone from the president and his wife on down to people like director level people, deans and people in between. The people who often get asked about things they see happening. And we actually send out what amounts to a daily just very brief email of items that we know are going to pop up in the news. Many of those are positive. Many others are not crises at all. But it gives us</p>

R3:	a way to communicate and relationship-build when things are still kind of bubbling, so that if something involves into a crisis people are not surprised that happened. It avoids those situations where a dean or a vice president will call and say, 'what do you mean this has been bubbling for two weeks and is now blown up on us? How did we not know about that?' So even those day to day communications help us in a crisis in a lot of instances.
R4:	The complicating factor at the same time this work force reduction was happening we had already engaged in a process to lease a brand new building which is where we're located now. And so there was the complicating factor of, 'well why are we moving to this brand new building? If we need to be cutting expenses, why do we want to stay where we are and then we won't have to reduce the workforce?' And so that was part of the complexity of trying to tell the story was that.... with the building and move, that was a process that started probably five years earlier. And our current space still wasn't going to accommodate our long term needs. So directionally that was still the right thing to do, but it was sort of was this discomfort not only internally and externally. What was the business in the Twin Cities area? How are they going to view this? And the optics of this was, there's this new building going up that [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] was going to move into, and oh by the way, you know there's been a reduction in force.
R5:	<p>We had a reporter that was really interested in covering a story. Kind of built a story to be a little... it was a story, but built it to the bigger story than it should have been. So we did have to share some things out. We didn't go as broad as our whole employee base. We did go as far as our domestic employee base. We did communicate with the ELT. Just to say, here, heads up.</p> <p>Again, knowing our employees, they do better when they hear directly from their supervisor. So as people came to them, we wanted them armed and ready to answer the questions. That said, that group is kind of stressed. They have so much on them. And then to ask them to communicate all of this stuff, I worry about that. Just because that is a lot for anybody to try and run a business and then have to deal with all this extra stuff is hard.</p>
R9:	<p>Well again, just about every crisis we've ever worked, and I'm talking everything from health care fraud to campus protests to claims that a drug killed thousands of people, employees always are involved one way or another. We must consider the significance of the issue of informing them or the repercussions of not informing them.</p> <p>Our challenge often is the internal culture of the organization and how top down things may be, and trying to find the sweet spot where employees feel they're not</p>

R9:	<p>out of the loop and they can dismiss the noise from social and noise from mainstream media. But again, that's getting that benefit of the doubt.</p> <p>We're working with an organization now, I think it's we're in our third year, they're going through an incredible cultural change where they were led by a president who where information was power and it was used against people. There was a lot of heavy, heavy, heavy handedness. And now there's a new president who's trying to really rebuild the organization, rebuild trust to get people working collaboratively, to arrive at recommendations or decisions by consensus, and people are having a tough time with that because they were so beaten down by the old way. So it's in many ways baby steps for them to see that it's changing and that this new president is it is the real deal. He wants to hear my point of view. He wants to be at the table. He's not asking for me to tell him what he wants to hear, but what he wants to hear is for me to tell him what I think and why. And employees talk to one another, and they share it. That can be incredibly helpful.</p> <p>So in a crisis, there were more times when you're considering what your key audiences are and oftentimes employees are a key audience and you're going to tend to want to over communicate. Any time there is a lengthy gap in communications, especially in a crisis where a lot of stuff is being bandied about, particularly externally, the longer the gap the more questions arise. We always try to get our clients to arrive at a place where they feel like it's important that we, even if we have no news, we need to say we're still working on it. We have nothing. No additional information to share, but we're trying to figure this out.</p> <p>Again I think so much of it has to do with action. If you one is taking action that clearly underscore the urgency, the severity of the situation, and our actions that are going to be, I'll just put it simply, the right thing to do, then that will cross most audiences. Board members make have a harder time with that than any because they're so close to it. And they want to they may want to fight something.</p>
R10:	<p>I think one of the things we recommend is when you're getting to that, having multiple external communications, you update your own people. Maybe it is an e-mail in this case. And just say, 'by the way....'</p> <p>We had an incident in another Midwestern state where two employees were being charged with abuse. And it was an ongoing criminal case which meant it was an ongoing media case. And in this case, the organization was very, very good. Before the first story ever ran and the criminal charges were filed, they communicated to their board and their employees that night saying, 'we know that these charges have been filed and we know that the media has access to it and we expect media tonight so we wanted you to be aware.' Or the next</p>

R10:	<p>morning, 'you may have seen this news outlet talk about this, this, this, and this.' And they hit him right at the beginning and then every step of the way when there's a significant development with that case or they know there's going to be more media, they reach back to their people and say again, 'just a reminder. You're aware of the situation. You're going to see a lot more exposure tonight.' So the good organizations do that.</p> <p>We've had two actually in the last year where they were criminal in nature and very public. But before the public heard it or read it, the folks inside were told that this was coming.</p>
R11:	<p>Well it's always better to try to get ahead of the situation by being proactive about it. And that's not always possible. You may be in a standby mode for a variety of reasons. It could be legal reasons. There could be competitive reasons. But if you are able to get ahead of it and put your perspective on this situation first, I think that always is better than being forced into a reactive mode... having to respond to what is stated out there in the media. So the more proactive you can be the better... I say, in general that would be a rule of thumb. In terms of your messaging, reinforcing and reassuring, being honest and transparent. If mistakes were made, admit it and apologize. Then address how the organization plans to make it better.</p>

Q15: Was there a time where you're messaging was different for various internal audiences? Or, did your messaging look different internal versus externally?	
R3:	<p>I think between stakeholder groups, and even between the internal and external communication, I think organizations that try to make external versus internal or internal among stakeholders too different is a recipe for disaster. We have found, and certainly this is the case at the university, anything we send out, social media, e-mail, anything can and will be leaked immediately.</p> <p>Generally, when we send out mass e-mail, even in a non-crisis situation, someone on this campus forwards it to a reporter and we're getting phone calls in minutes. Because there's really so much crossover now and really no private message at an organization like this, we really are careful to provide consistency in messages. The student message might give different or more specific to them instructions. But the overarching message is going to be very much the same.</p>

R4:	<p>It was not as much as we intended to be proactive communication externally. It was really being prepared to share it in terms of the general public. It was more about being prepared.</p> <p>We have a whole network of partners that we work with, transplant centers, and donor centers, and cord blood banks, and all kinds of other centers. And so we did do proactive communication to them about what was happening.</p> <p>But the general public side, it was more about being prepared in case something popped up and we had to address it, which is ultimately something that did occur.</p>
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Q16: Would you recommend using external media to reach your internal audience?	
R10:	<p>Never. Never. I think it is a Herculean mistake unless you can... unless it's the only way to reach them. Why should I give a rip if somebody in the media says I'm a great employee or we'll get through this? I should say, why would you ever use the media to deliver a message you can deliver yourself? And if that's the only channel available then you've got real problems.</p> <p>There's no reason in the world that any company in this world can't reach their employees in an effective way that's more effective than mass media. With the exception of certain natural disasters, you know that's the rarity. You have a hurricane and you have a manufacturing site in the Gulf Coast and you literally can't reach people. Yeah. Then you use the media to talk to your people but that is such... it's like having your neighbor come in and tuck your kid into bed and say you love him. 'Dad says he loves you tonight. Bye.' Why would you do that? Using the media is really dangerous. Number one: You lose control of the message.</p>
R11:	<p>I don't think that's a good idea at all because, you know, we have a free press. We need them. I don't think that's a good strategy. But I will say what you want to see in those news stories are some of the message your team message is trying to get across and whether that's a quote from a spokesperson or picked up from a statement that was released. I mean that is about as much as I think you can hope for.</p> <p>And then of course if people, if your customers got a letter from you and they see the same basic couple of messages in the news story that's a good thing. That means you're reinforcing your message through a couple of different ways and that gets back to the being honest and transparent and developing those messages.</p> <p>I wouldn't rely on media. Of course you can advance some of your messaging around a crisis through your own social media channel and responding to</p>

R11:	customers and others who are concerned about it that way. I think it's essential in a crisis situation to monitor social media, respond, take the temperature constantly. I would say the internal system is pretty broken if that's what you need to do.
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Q17: Is there anything you would have done differently during the crisis from an internal communications perspective?	
R1:	<p>I think one thing is again, like I said before, we were taken aback by that just the degree of the aggressive untruths that the union used. And I think we would have understanding that now if this, God forbid ever happens again, we'll be better prepared for that.</p> <p>I think also we underestimated our own nurses capacity to stay out on strike for as long as they did. I think we thought that they would come back and perhaps we miscalculated the degree to which they were willing to stay out on strike longer.</p> <p>The other thing I'd say is that I would... we did use external PR agency resources. I would have got them involved sooner had I known that it was going to go on this long. So they were very helpful when we got them engaged. In hindsight, I wish I'd got them engaged a month or so earlier.</p>
R2:	<p>Yeah. In retrospect, I would probably... I mean, I was at a disadvantage only because I was new to the company and the culture. In retrospect, I probably would have engaged somebody just to help me with the culture more. The more you know the culture, the better able you are to shape the messaging, both timing and content and channel. I didn't have an appreciation.</p> <p>So I just gave you this long answer on how important they are. But I didn't know when I started the simple things like you know don't produce a video for a store because the capacity for them to play a video in a store is highly limited. You want to get then written messages or podcast, audio, but video is really hard. You know things like. The more you know about a company and its culture, the more effective you are. If you don't, you better learn the culture as quickly as you can during a crisis. And explicitly have somebody to hold your hand and say, 'yeah that's not going to fly. It may work somewhere else. But that's not going to fly here.' So, in retrospect, knowing the culture would have been better.</p> <p>I didn't understand the power of the Star Tribune as well as I could have. By that, I mean, not just the effectiveness as an internal interfacing organ, but how well sources it was within the company and where those like sources were. It took me a long time to figure out that there were certain key constituencies that were</p>

R2:	likely a source, and if I were close to those constituencies I could either effect their leaks or reduce their leaks. Which would have made my external/internal communications better.
R3:	<p>Every time there are things we would have done differently. In the football scandal in December when at one point the team actually was planning to boycott our bowl game... this is actually an issue we talk about a lot. How do we balance the legal concerns with the PR concerns. So in that instance, the lawyers in the room were very clear and the law is very clear. You're dealing with student athletes who have privacy protections as students. They have FERPA protections. You know, you can't just go out and say these students have been accused of X. And in that instance, we had a fairly large group of students who were implicated. Some ever implicated because they were a witness. Some perhaps implicated because they were more involved. But as an organization, we cannot explain any of that. All we can say is we benched players for breaking team rules. So from the outside world, they are like, 'are you kidding me? That's all you're going to say? Don't you have more to say about this issue?'</p> <p>In that instance, I think we would have wished we would have, as an organization, been more willing to take some extra legal risk to avoid communications problems. Putting the athletic director in front of the camera and not preparing him with something to say beyond, 'I can't talk about the particulars of this case.' That was a terrible decision on our part. Because it made him look weak. It made him look like he was hiding something. That would have gone much better had we taken more prep time and thought and frankly a little more legal risk to say, 'we can't talk about this, but let me tell you about how we handle situations on this campus. Let me tell you why I can't give you more information. It's because we have a commitment to our students for their privacy and if your student fail the class or got into trouble or was seeking mental health counseling, would you want us as an Administration talking about your student's issues? No.' But we didn't. We simply said the law doesn't allow us to talk about this.</p> <p>So I think the 'how would we do different' ... would be having more discussions and enforcing leadership to think about can we take a little extra legal risk to help us on the PR side, preparing the leaders with some sort of narrative that maybe isn't the one everyone wants to hear but still gives them something responsive to say, that keeps them out of hot water.</p> <p>And then the prep time. You know, in a crisis, I think any communicator is going to feel rushed and pressured to get someone on camera in the first few moments. If that person isn't prepared even by taking 15 minutes more, and they mess up on</p>

R3:	<p>camera, you've just created a whole other crisis for yourself. And so, taking that step back in the place of immense pressure, is really hard to do. But it should be done.</p>
R4:	<p>I think we could have a little bit more clarity on the story. But again trying to do more to try to get it in a little bit more of a straight forward fashion. In our desire to give as much detail as we possibly could, I think that may have at in the very beginning made it a little bit more difficult to understand. I don't know.</p> <p>I think we could have done some different things in terms of pacing for how much information we we're sharing. You know, at different time periods I think we may be trying to share absolutely everything that we could at the beginning and I think that may have caused some feelings of being overwhelmed or people not being fully capable of absorbing things before the cascade started. So that would be one thing I think we could have done differently is to really think about the pacing, and again looking at that level of detail where is it appropriate to go into great detail and where should we have tried to simplify things little bit more.</p>
R5:	<p>I think it's a given, but we've gone some leadership internally that want to keep the in the know circle very, very small. I am not that way. My mentality is that they have NDAs [non-disclosures] for a reason. Just have people sign them and get them in the room. I'm more of the mindset that people need to know and we should tell them as early as we can tell them. Because you're just going to get a better outcome when you have the right people in the room. So that's a big challenge.</p> <p>Personally, just getting into this role, I thought there was going to be more figured out. I thought there was going to be more process and procedures figured out. More things that would have been built on best practices versus just building them because they needed to happen. So that's some of the other digging that I've got to do. Just making sure you're guiding yourself with the best thinking before just doing the work.</p>
R7:	<p>I think one thing that that's useful is if you got to a place where you can put up frequently asked questions. So for employees... 'so why did the bridge collapse?' 'You know we don't know. There's an investigation. When we know what the cause was we'll let you know.' Just want the basic information. Although it was pretty available media.</p> <p>One of the things about this particular crisis that I thought was... it's important to note is that there was so much media coverage of it for so long that, in some ways, that's where the employees got their information. And sometimes they got it faster from the media than they did from us because the media can speculate.</p>

R7:	<p>Whereas, we can't and because of the investigation there was some things that we really don't want to talk about those things.</p> <p>But again, it was the kind of crisis that for most people, like I showed you, 'oh, that was something that happened in the metro.' And even up here, there were some offices and some people were dramatically affected every single day. And then there were some that it was just nothing new.</p> <p>And some measure of that crisis was due to what was going on with the administration. I mean the commissioner and so on. She left in February 2008 basically. So then an assistant commissioner named [NAME] became the commissioner, acting commissioner. And he was our boss, our boss's boss, and also communications training professional prior to this. And so he was pretty good. And I think he talked to employees and he got the word out. But so much of his time was sucked up by dealing with the investigation, building the new bridge, and so on.</p> <p>I will say this. When [NAME] left, [NAME] was in, and then when [NAME] left and Sorel came in, that's when I started as the communications director. And my predecessor [NAME] was here until the bridge, 35W was done. And then he let her go and interviewed two of us and asked me to take the job. But I remember Sorel was very big on communicating with employees. We have this thing called NoteMailer where we can email to every single employee. And he was big on sending out NoteMailer notes and doing things to keep employees informed. He did that following the collapse and he also did that a lot during the 2011 shutdown.</p> <p>She [The Commissioner] was in crisis. I mean from the very beginning of the collapse, it was a very difficult thing for her to deal with. She didn't want to face the press until the governor told her she had to. At our Roseville office, we were doing almost daily news conferences. I mean right after the collapse we were doing a couple a day and then almost daily. And as time passed, it slowed down. But it was pretty intense. Very difficult for her.</p> <p>There was a much greater focus externally, in that first year, on the public. And not as much internal and that may have been a mistake. We maybe, except we didn't have the resources, but it would have been good to have... although you did a great job with that newsletter and pushing things out. I think we did a pretty good job.</p>
R8:	<p>Our website wasn't as robust as it is today, but that actually internally and externally... I mean it may not have been finessed as nicely or spoon-fed information to people, but it had everything on it. I mean everything to do with</p>

R8:	<p>the bridge, and what was going on, the various investigations as the months went on. There was... the legislative auditor was involved as well as NTSB. And you know there were lots of people involved and we just essentially put raw data out there, the public data out there and try to put headers so they could find information that they needed.</p> <p>I don't think we ever did a survey of our employees. For us, there's a group of people, our office being one of them and the other offices around here, it was a constant level of crisis that kind of went on for months.</p> <p>There were tons of spinoffs on the collapse. The statewide bridge inspection and there were other bridges that closed. One, Highway 23 in St. Cloud closed within that first few months because they started inspecting that thing that caused this bridge to collapse. So it had a lot of tentacles and it was probably more politicized because [NAME] was our commissioner and it was a Democratic legislature.</p> <p>Yeah, his [The commissioner] role coming in was to build up our reputation and he saw it also as employee moral that kind of got crushed.</p> <p>We did use our internal newsletter a lot. And I actually think it was pretty, I think since I was the one editing it, it was actually pretty strong. We had a lot of variety and a lot of information out there.</p> <p>[NAME] wasn't sending out too many emails at that time.</p>
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Q18: Was there any communications done post-crisis? If so, what was that like? What was the strategy behind the communications?	
R1:	<p>That was a lot of our CEO [NAME OF CEO] and this really came from her wanting to get out into these places that particularly suffered through this and show that we are still one organization. That we acknowledge the trauma that this organization has just been through, and we want to listen to their concerns and hear how it was for them and work together to make sure that we aren't ever this divided again. And she's a perfect person for that. I mean, she genuinely feels that desire to be part of that healing process in the organization.</p> <p>That said, I mean she took a lot of the brunt of the angst in this because she's a doctor, she's worked with a lot of nurses. When she became the CEO, I think nurses felt like, 'we have a friend in the CEO's office.' And I think the union narrative tried to spin her as having sold out her medical roots to the all-mighty corporate dollar. I mean, that's the kind of the perspective that they tried to give and I think that bothered her a lot. I mean, she did obviously feel that she was</p>

R1:	<p>standing up for her convictions and that wasn't true. But it bothered her that, that was the story that was being told.</p> <p>So I think in that post-strike process she wanted to go out and demonstrate in a face-to-face way more than any memo could that she's still the same [NAME OF CEO] that you've known for all these years. That she still cares about patients more than anything else, and all that.</p> <p>So that's been a lot of what we've done. I think creating opportunities for nurses to feel more heard, to raise concerns about things. We've always tried to do that, but I think we've doubled down on that since the strike. There is a dynamic sort of thing that occurs during a strike where it feels to us like the nurses feel, and the union very much encourages this, that the union would like the nurses to believe that they are in some ways.... that the union is their employer. I mean, that and that [NAME OF COMPANY] is sort of the enemy. And there's a lot of talk around, 'well we and the nurses are part of the same company. It's the union that's sort of third party.' And how can we try to strengthen those bonds between our nurses and our organization so that the influence of the union over nurses is lessened.</p> <p>And I can imagine that listening to all that is that I or the organization comes across as fairly anti-union. And I also want to say that I don't feel that way sort of categorically. I think that labor unions do a ton of good and have accomplished many, many great things for our society over the decades. But I would say in this particular union in this particular situation behaved in ways that ultimately did not serve their members very well at all. They led them down a path over a cliff and that didn't have to happen. So I wanted to make that clear to me they're not anti-union. But in this case this is bad.</p> <p>[So a strategic decision was made?]</p> <p>Yes. Yes. Particularly with those employees who are directly affected... the nurses themselves. The reason behind it was the strategy behind it. Again, because the goal that we're trying to reinforce is again the sort of relationship piece to make... to help both participants feel like there is a personal relationship and that we're just not sort of the faceless corporate office who every three years comes down and tries to give you a less beneficial contract. But that there are actual people here who are trying to lead the organization in a way that is for the betterment of all employees and for the communities we serve.</p> <p>And I think there's really no substitute for face-to-face when it comes to delivering that kind of message and making incredible. We were going all over the place and doing that, but it's also about the local leadership carrying that out as well. And I</p>
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R1:	<p>think they've been effective at doing that. You know we'll see. I mean in 2019 we'll negotiate again and we'll see what happens.</p> <p>But I think in the sort of off years it's really important for us to demonstrate our commitment to these principles. So it just doesn't feel like it 2019 we're heading into another crisis and then we try to throw our arms around the nurses and show them how much we love them. We've got to do that now when we're in a trough rather than when we're trying to take the hill again.</p>
R2:	<p>My view of internal communications management is that it's always a lagging indicator. It takes longer for them to catch on to the severity of the crisis. So they start worrying after external constituencies start worrying and they continue worrying after external constituencies have stopped worrying.</p> <p>One of the lessons I've learned over and over and over and over, not just here, is when the media has moved on the internal audience has not. You cannot take your signal to stop talking simply because you're no longer in the paper. Because, boy, those feeling of concern and fear and anxiety frustration and anger and mistrust, whatever those feelings are, they linger far, far longer than the coverage.</p>
R3:	<p>So, I'll use the crime example. At some point, and I think it was actually winter, the crime stopped when it got cold. Winter is often helpful for crime. There were kind of residual effects. People had this feeling of you know is Campus safe? We were hearing from parents and small towns saying I'm not sure I want to send my kids to the middle of the big city where there is crime. We were hearing from prospective students and their families, well maybe I choose the rural, liberal arts school instead of the urban campus.</p> <p>So part of what we had to do, and this was an operational decision, we had worked with our operation people to develop a full program of security upgrades that could be done on campus to enhance safety. In fact, the Board of Regents committed four million dollars for those projects. And it was things like improving lighting, replacing cameras on campus that weren't high quality, improving services like a chauffeur service.</p> <p>And so Communications was a big part of reporting out here are the steps that we've taken to improve. And again, consistency of message of our commitment to safety. But it was about showing progress and improvement because what else are you really going to do to prevent crime. We actually even worked with first-year orientation programs to tweak the messaging that they were given to students as their first coming to campus both make them more aware of the safety issues, but to give them tools and knowledge to protect themselves.</p>

R3:	<p>So kind of the post-crisis in that instance was really about how are we going to try to avoid this problem in the future? And how are we making progress and better quipping the campus and people to deal with these risks.</p>
R4:	<p>Yes, a lot of that was primarily done through the various executives for their own areas of the organization. So we had some level of cascading that happened in a more targeted way with key messages that were more relevant to the specific impacted departments.</p> <p>So again not all department experienced a reduction. And so the approach varied depending on whether or not the department was directly impacted. And then we relied on kind of a combination of written and meetings, whether they were team meetings or one-on-one meetings, as well as some written communication. So there were kind of specific communications plans for each department that was impacted.</p>
R5:	<p>Another area for improvement is... we need to do a better job doing hot washes. We need to get in a room and see what worked and what didn't work. We're getting better. We're getting better. But I also think seeking input from other groups outside of the communications group.</p> <p>So we're just about to start... we don't have any fancy name for it yet, but an advisory group. So I want to find 5-6 key people from different businesses that can be like, 'ok, here's the issue. What are you guys hearing?' Kind of get a pulse of what's going on in the country. That's a bit more externally focused. But it could be internally too. And just get an understanding of what they're hearing. Well then afterwards, think that is the perfect group as well to go back to say, 'how did it work? What didn't work?' So we just have a better... so we can fine tune things. We do it. But we need to be a bit more purposeful in it.</p>
R6:	<p>We there were several learning from it that we can come to in a minute. But the communications after that is, you know, continuing to be prepared should it happen again, should we get to that point again.</p> <p>You know it really demonstrated the relationships that we had, even with... especially with the national media were just invaluable. And so, you know, obviously continuing to push through to the end of the crisis and after with appropriate messages and resources and tools.</p> <p>We do each year, the [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] does a vulnerability. And I'm working on it now actually for 2018. So we do it six months or so in advance of the beginning of the year so that we can plan against, like is there something that was identified that shows that we need more research in that area or shows that we need spokespeople or shows that you know we're vulnerable in some way. Can</p>

R6:	<p>we change a practice or whatever? And the previous year's assessment had actually identified swine influenza virus as a concern. But it was a concern from an animal health standpoint not from a human health standpoint. So now when we do our vulnerability assessment, we have we work to broaden our scope of the things that we identify as vulnerabilities. So we're not focusing as tightly on pork production or pork consumption, but we're focused a little bit more broadly on what are all the crazy things that could potentially be associated with this. And now let's narrow that down a little bit and see where we really need to to hone in our resources for the year.</p> <p>We do different levels of evaluation after different crises that we have, that we go through. And based on the intensity of the situation that determines the level of evaluation that we do. We rarely, knock on wood, are in orange. And so for us to be in orange for that length of time we did a very extensive evaluation of all the actions that we took during H1N1 and came out with a list of things that worked well and a list of the things that we needed to do differently or do better at. And one of those was clearly with internal communications. So through surveys and an evaluation process, that's how that was identified.</p>
R8:	<p>Maybe with the bridge collapse, you know, we could have done more of after action on the communications front. I'm sure they have on engineering. But I can't underscore this enough, there was never time to breathe for pretty much the first 15 months.</p>
R9:	<p>The post-crisis stuff is really an opportunity to understand some things. Did we achieve our communications objectives? Did we resolve this in a manner that we set out to? What are we hearing back from our key audiences externally and what are we hearing from our audiences internally?</p> <p>Let's go back to the factory example. The factory is shut down because of regulatory action. Those employees are going to be out of a job for a while. How long? Are you going to bring me in for training so you can pay me or what are you going to do in the end because I've got rent or a mortgage to pay, a kid in college. So during the crisis with employees, keeping them apprised of the progress being made and how this ultimately affects them is key. Because if they think we're playing around with them then they're going to go someplace else and then when we get back up and running we're not just up and running with people who know how to get up and running. We're up and running with people who don't. Now we have to train them. And being able to kick out a thousand widgets a day isn't going to happen. We're kicking out a third because we've got people in training.</p> <p>So in our crisis management approach, where we're anticipating these things getting folks to really understand internally how our approach affects those</p>

R9:	<p>employees. And if those employees don't feel that they're a consideration, then they're going to look for other opportunities. So in post-crisis, it's circling back to them making certain that they understand, that they feel that they were informed. If not why not, what could we do better. And in applying those lessons for the next time.</p> <p>This was something we dealt with last year. A factory was shut down. The leadership is very considerate of their employees. They have a tough job to do. They kind of rotate them through their line of work so that they're not doing the same thing over and over and over again. They get shut down. They know that there's rent to pay, there's a car payment to make, there is a mortgage to pay. And so initially, leadership arrived there like, well if we bring them in for four hours a day for training, they will at least get half-time. They will at least get half what they're accustomed to. And that was the direction we were going. And then we brought in someone further down in the organization to kind of gut check this. And this person said, 'oh no. We better not do that because they can make more money on unemployment.' That changes everything. I learned that we were not good. We won't do that. But that only meant that we needed to keep them informed so they wouldn't jump ship to another company.</p> <p>Now, what about these checks and balances like that bringing in somebody else that may be further down the organization to say it is a huge mistake? Part of our approach is to get those subject matter experts at the table. So we're not telling them do this, do this, do this. We're asking them questions. So here what are your thoughts about it and about how we keep our employees informed? In the end, they're out front. They're the ones who are, if their line supervisors, shift super. What you don't want them to be saying is, 'hey this wasn't my decision. I don't like it either.' You know undermines credibility.</p> <p>I would have been in a position of messaging. OK. We're bringing you in for four hours today as opposed to when we were thinking about bringing me in for first day but we are talking to the state unemployment office. Your label will be able to get X dollars more by filing for unemployment. And here's where you can go and your unemployment will last. We believe it will be down only for a good amount of time. So you want to cover that. That's an action that will be much more favorably by the employees. You're in a position to message that and it's going to be received well. Again, we've learned the hard way. You have these folks who were up top in the C suite who really are disconnected with the audience perception. And so it's imperative to understand who these audiences are and how do they perceive us now. And when they learn this is occurring, what's going to be their expectations of us and why.</p>
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R10:	<p>Be careful. Because when the fire is out you don't want to throw sparks into the mix. So be very careful. Defining when a crisis is over is extremely difficult. We talked a lot this morning. It was a very hot topic It is really difficult to tell when a crisis is over and so don't declare victory or don't declare an end to a crisis too soon because if we do and there's an outshoot of that, maybe even litigation, now your employees are going to go, 'you said it was over!' Now this is a new crisis. You've created a new crisis.</p> <p>But when you know it's done, done, done, the message is, 'it's been a difficult time. We got through it together and now let's make sure that our central focus is our future together.' Thank them for working through a really difficult period and then move on, but then move on. Then move on and then start communicating the way you normally do.</p>
R11:	<p>I think it's important for management.... this is what I would recommend and have recommended. I think it's important for management or leadership to reflect on what have we learned from the experience. What's changed as a result of this experience? If anything good... I mean not every crisis situation is fair. I've been involved with organizations that were doing really good work, small nonprofits, and they really took it on the chin in the media and they struggled after and not every issue that happens that is based on true and hard facts. Sometimes life is not fair.</p> <p>So it's possible that if reflecting on it might be we were accused of something that we didn't or we hadn't done. You know, this is how we tried to address it with our key audience. Going forward we remain committed to actualizing whatever it might be.</p> <p>I've been involved in a couple of FCC investigations of organizations for individuals I've worked with and what I thought was... one was related to the small technology company that had gone public and the president had, unbeknownst to everybody, set up a shell company and was funneling payments to that company. That would be basically for himself and his family. There wasn't actually any service being provided and the chief financial officer was the whistleblower and the board named... so the president resigned and was eventually investigated by the FCC. The chief financial officer took over the company and was running it and trying to save it. As you can imagine, when the news broke it was very hard on the company and hard on the company's prospects with investors and so on. So that was a pretty small company and our major involvement was on external actually. I don't remember that we did much on internal.</p>

R11:	And then in another case there was someone who I knew, thought highly of, and that individual came under FCC investigation and I don't know all the facts of the situation but to me it didn't seem fair. So you know not every external crisis situation is fair but sometimes organizations take it on the chin.
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Q19: How do/did you know when the crisis is over?	
R6:	<p>You'll recall that that the media moved away from... we worked with the CDC, and the government, and the World Health Organization to change the nomenclature to the scientific nomenclature which is H1N1 and move away from swine flu. So one of the big milestones was when the media stopped using swine flu or they used H1N1 and then they would put swine flu in parentheses behind it. So that was really milestone number two.</p> <p>So number one was the phrase, 'your pork is safe' or 'pork is safe.' And that was really our first message. The first goal was to get that out there. 'Your pork is safe.' And then the conversion from swine flu to H1N1. And then we were monitoring that entire time. We were doing regular surveys with our consumers to understand what they're buying, what they're actually buying and what their buying intentions were. And if they were being impacted or not by swine flu. And when we got to the point where we got beyond the flu season and the disease started to die out. Consumers... really their purchasing habits research, which was critical to have that, really showed us that it wasn't impacting their purchasing habits as much as we thought that it would be. I would say I don't know but three weeks into it. And so just trying to carry that momentum of pork is safe and the consumers still wanted to buy it.</p>
R10:	<p>It's kind of a gut feel. I mean, certain things, certain situations you can tell there is no chance for litigation or the storm has passed and you're back up and running, and the data breach has been fixed and you've communicated with people. It's more art than science. So it's not a simple checklist. It's not. And that's what everybody wants.</p> <p>We've built crisis plans. They have metrics and charts and graphs and scales and they're guidance. Because at the end of the day, leaders make decisions because they're leaders and a lot of that is based on data and it's based on gut. So like in the case of a social media crisis, the kind of software that we have, we can tell when the conversation is dead. This is fluff and it goes a flat line long enough that you can look through data and get the kind of figure that we are good right now.</p> <p>At a university, I really can't give you any details but, we are in a crisis right now. And I will tell you, as we sit here, they are convinced that the crisis is over. They</p>

R10:	<p>are convinced. All we're waiting for is a criminal case but our part is done. And they couldn't be more wrong. They're going to get hit like a train in the coming months because there's going to be litigation. There's going to be backlash from people piecing together how it ended. And it ain't going to be good. But universities tend to be on summer break and the grass gets green and flowers look pretty and the students go away and everything's fine. Well, that ain't going to be the case for this university.</p> <p>We get paid to look down the road. We get paid to look around corners. We get paid look at things that people don't want us to look at. We get to be the cynics in the room. The world doesn't love you as much as you think they do if you're a university, or business, or a consumer facing... 'Everyone loves us! We're great!' No you're not. No you're not. And we get paid to tell them that politely.</p>
R11:	<p>That's a really great question. Well from our perspective, the client is no longer interested in us being involved. They're kind of like, 'we got this. We got this.' We tend to be as outside people brought in in the acute phase and then we make recommendations for going forward. This is how you should keep your employees informed, your customers, etc. But that's kind of our market. Because people when they're in a crisis they really do want help and there isn't a big discussion about, 'well, how much is this going to cost?' They're just like, 'come in and ease our pain. Help us address this because we need somebody with a different perspective than all of us internally have.'</p> <p>I have to say it's a very satisfying thing to be able to step into a thorny situation and just be the calm presence and say OK what happened, what are we going to say about it, and let's figure out getting the word out in these ways.</p>

Q20: What does the organization do for crisis communication planning?	
R1:	<p>One way to answer that is we have a crisis response model in health care called the HICS model which stands for, in this case, Hospital Incident Command Structure. And it's a process that is used in all sorts of kind of disasters, not only in hospitals but if there's a hurricane or things like that. And it creates a structure that has defined roles and people to fill those roles. And so it starts at the top with an incident commander and there are various different roles that sort of manage crises, whether it's about how to get food and water to people who need them to do search and rescue, and all sorts of things.</p> <p>One of the roles in that structure is the public information officer. So that's the role that I play and that person is in charge for all things communications. So almost invariably, when there's anything that even feels remotely like a crisis we</p>

R1:	<p>all sort of stand up that structure... which you know creates a process to sort of go through a checklist of what do we need to be thinking about. So we're not just sort of in the midst of crisis like, what should we do?' You know we've sort of got a process in place that that speaks to the communication space, sort of evaluate the key stakeholders, evaluate what needs communications, and what sequence and what urgency those stakeholders need to be communicated with. And it starts to create a roadmap for executing those communications based on whatever channels you might have available to you.</p> <p>So that's kind of a standing process that is sort of just there to implement no matter what or when something hits. So for example, we're using that right now in terms of the measles epidemic. OK, so there's a measles epidemic. Obviously, there are multi-dimensions to the way that might affect the healthcare systems like ours. Everything from trying to make sure that people with measles don't come into our hospitals and infect everyone else, to making sure that we're vaccinating our pediatric patients or getting proper information and guidance about vaccination, and all that kind of stuff, to make sure our employees are appropriately vaccinated. So we have an incident command structure for that. And so we have communications that go on a regular cadence to clinic managers and physicians, the emergency room, managers, employees. We've done a thorough scan of who's been vaccinated and who hasn't and we've set up resources if we have any employees who should be vaccinated but aren't, tracking them down and making sure they understand the need to do that and all that kind of stuff. So there's a lot of structure in place to do that.</p> <p>Then more specifically, if a specific crisis hits you want to start to put together your tool kit of things you know you're going to need, whether it's like a media holding statement, or a Q&A, or just a set of key messages. And in some cases, if it's something you know you're going to want to proactively communicate outside of the organization, then you start thinking about, 'OK, who do I need to tell and in what order?' You know there might be cases where you want the attorney general and the governor to know before it appears in the newspaper or other regulators to know. Sort of your neighbor and again your own employees to know before it appears in the paper. And we have templates that we use so we're not reinventing the wheel every time one of these things hits. So we've been through enough crises, and I think health care in general is pretty well prepared for crises because they happen with some regularity that we've got a good process which we can ramp up.</p>
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R2:	<p>Just as your best practice would be to have external holding statements for a range of potential crises, the same thing would be true internally. Just as externally you would want to have potentially a list of who was going to be in the room, what your room is going to look like, who is going to be there handling external, you would want the same thing for internal. But generally those are the same groups, the same people. Because the last thing you want to do is to have two sets of facts floating around.</p> <p>I think the critical thing for an internal crisis that would be different from external is your range of spokespeople would be much, much broader internally than externally. So understanding how you're going to use your executive ranks. In a crisis internally, that would be really important. So every company has got its rock stars internally. You would not generally think of them as external facing, but internally you'd want to put them up at a town hall. You'd want to make sure they were having lunch in the cafeteria so people could stop by and see them. I've said to a couple of rock stars that I need you walk the halls more during the day than you are now. I need you to be seen more. I need you to be seen smiling and be available to people to come up and ask you questions. That counts for a lot.</p> <p>So internal planning would have a sense of who are my go to people. You don't have to write that down. But you need an idea who they are and how you might use them depending on the circumstance.</p> <p>So for instance, so often our crises occur within the store or within a territory. So it could be a natural disaster. It could death of an employee. We had an employee murdered in one of our stores about six months ago. That's a legitimate crisis. Her ex-husband came into our store and started firing shots at her and there was a lockdown in one of our stores, and one of our employees died. That's a real crisis. Well, what's the plan? The plan is to have a couple of key people go to that store and handle the crisis locally, including my own staff. Those are the kinds of things that from an external perspective, it got a little bit of media coverage. Sadly, these things are not well covered in America. We handle this from here and we moved on. But man, I need to have a plan specific to that location and I needed to implement that plan in a way that was very human and didn't rely on e-mail or messaging when we needed to be on the ground.</p>
R4:	<p>So we do have some of those mechanisms in place for more like a crisis that could disrupt our day to day business like an emergency preparedness kind in crisis communications team. So for example, you know some of our partner organizations were concerned about some recent cyber threats. And so then as a team we kind of look at and assess how that impacts both our partners and then</p>

R4:	<p>our employees and what our response is going to be. And I think a similar process was used for that concern about the potential for a breach of privacy information.</p> <p>So we have a team that's in place, but they're really designated again for things that we think have the potential to disrupt the core operations of our work. And so there's sort of a separate process for that. That is a little bit different than what we used for the workforce reduction.</p> <p>So it's this kind of that for our process for any time situations are identified. There's sort of a team that's activated and so the process includes what do leaders need to know, what do employees need to know, what does the team that answers our 1-800 line need to know? Are we going to have any kind of public statements? What to our network partners need to know?</p> <p>So there's a representative, a cross-functional team, representing all of the major areas in our organization as well as representing those stakeholders outside of our organization that that might be impacted by a particular change. So it's something that we do it and if it's a kind of a major event then there would be afterward... we do kind of a review on how did the communication go or how are the steps we took.. how effective were they. We can think about this going forward and it really was born out of wanting to ensure that we were not... as things emerge that we're not interrupting the patient's activity to get the products that they need.</p> <p>So it kind of really spurred our contingency planning. Because in our line of work, once the patient's immune system has been compromised in order to prepare for transplants, they need to get a transplant you know a very short window. So I think the larger crisis communication approach really came out of... any time we thought there could be a disruption to that ability to get our products where it needs to go. And that would be a trigger for this kind of process.</p>
R5:	<p>There's still a plan you can pull off the shelf. It's just a little dated. And we do have requirements within the company of crisis prep work. And that always includes reaching out to communications. So we've got a team. Right now it is five and it will be six actually here next week. That has responsibility for being a part of the crisis response team. So each week we have an on call person. So actually I'm the person this week. This is my pager. You can see a number of tests where we test the system and then a mock recall. So we're doing test drills. So when the EPA, FDA, all sorts of different ones, have requirements for testing your processes.</p> <p>And we go beyond that. So they will send us a notice of like a mock recall. Just like they would at the state to say we are testing this. And then we either supply them back with a responses, mock responses for that drill or we'll say, 'should this have</p>

R5:	<p>been an incident, we would have responded with these things.' So there is a process in place and it does work. We could be doing better.</p> <p>We do have a couple of key crisis groups within the organization that stand up if something happens. They would be your legal team. They would be your compliance group. They would be your environment, health and safety groups. So you would have some key business people. You would have some key corporate people. And they stand up when needed. We are part of that group. But we are by far, when it comes to crisis, we are by far activated exponentially more than any other crisis portion.</p> <p>Because we could have a... like for example, we get a lot of skimmers. They are really popular across the country. So we get a few of those occasionally with our [NAME OF BUSINESS] brand and locations. So we'll have to write responses to that. So [NAME OF BUSINESS] is location owned, locally owned. But we also have a corporate owned set of convenience stores. So there could be anything from... we had somebody pass away in the parking lot that was just filling his vehicle. So we had to write a response for that for the local media.</p> <p>Probably our most common one is just somebody getting hurt. So we respond to that too. I would say that on average when you're on call, you are going to get at least two or three calls. And some of them will turn into something and some of them won't be anything.</p> <p>So I'm new to the role. I've only been in this role for about five months or so. So when I took the role on... I've been on the crisis communications team. There are five of us. So we do on calls and all those kinds of things as well. But when I took the role, they were in the process, the original person in the role, was in the process of creating a crisis plan. Getting an app in place. Getting an on-call paging system through our phones. That was all in the works. And so, that is still in the works. I haven't put as much time to it as I would have liked to. But I've read the plan and I've provided it to our crisis team, which hadn't happened yet. So now I have their review, their feedback.</p> <p>So that's one of the challenges I find is, you just wish you had time to put more time towards crisis prep. Because you know how vital it is that that gets handled well. So I would love to find time to be able to just be more robust in that future planning. And we will get there. We need to get the plan finalized. Smart thinking on paper.</p> <p>And then we need to think through more robustly what those key top 12... these are the most likely things we're going to deal with. And started to put together a plan or some messages, and some different things for those kinds of situations. So</p>
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R5:	<p>that's on my radar. That's in my plans. I wish I could secure more time because with crisis... I feel like sometimes leadership just kind of expects it to go well. And don't really, truly doesn't realize the time it goes into making sure that it goes well. The forethought, the pre-planning. All of that.</p> <p>And because our days end up getting filled with what's happening today, as they do many times, I just wish I had more time. So we are looking at getting a good agency partner for that. Exactly for that reason. Because I need somebody that's going to keep moving this forward without me. But, sometimes some companies can do that and some can't.</p> <p>Very small [percentage of planning dedicated to internal communications]. I would say 25 percent. If that. Just because of how we are, a lot of what we share with our owners would be something we share with our employees. But not nearly as much as it should be. Especially, considering there are 12,000 of them.</p>
R6:	<p>So we did the evaluation we hired an outside agency to evaluate us and evaluate the response of the overall crisis and went everything. Giving them everything that we could so that they could evaluate what worked and what didn't. What we need to do differently and in that evaluation there were about 10 changes that were made because of that evaluation in how we do business today. And then we also... following that evaluation, then we actually began working with the company that had evaluated us to assist us in crisis planning.</p> <p>In the pork industry we have a lot of issues. We'll have about 50 issues or so that we do specialized monitoring on and that we work on throughout the year that pop up somewhere in the U.S. or across the world that we are involved in. And that's probably, I would assume that is a high percentage compared to potentially other industries. I don't know for sure. But we do utilize a lot of learning from every crisis that we've had or every issue that we've managed.</p> <p>I've been here for 25 years and having experienced those situations I think we gain in every one of them whether it is a undercover video on a hog farm or a truck roll over on an interstate that has drawn a lot of media and local attention. Or whether it is something you know all the way up the chain to H1N1. We learn from each one of those and try to improve our response. First we try to improve our preparedness so we don't have to deal with it as an issue. But then I think that our responses continue to improve as well. It's daily life in the pork industry.</p> <p>When we build out our plans, it's for the worst case scenario which for the pork industry we think that would be foot and mouth disease or a comparable foreign animal disease. And so we build for a worst case scenario and then we scale back based on that threat level of the issue or crisis that we're in. So if we have an</p>

R6:	<p>undercover video we don't have however many teams there are, we don't have all those teams together. We pull together four or five. People that we need to deal with that issue. So yeah, we prepare for the worst and try to make it all work out the best we can.</p> <p>We have talking points for all of our vulnerabilities that include research and information that are already created and we try to keep those up to date for the vulnerabilities. And then we have a file of, I don't know, somewhere around a hundred talking points on issues that we use from time to time.</p>
R7:	<p>We don't have a lot of crisis plans. I think probably one that comes closest is our... every year we prepare for snow and ice season. You wouldn't think of snow and ice as a crisis until the first snowstorm. And if we have real heavy snowstorms then it becomes a danger to the public. And we've got a pretty good plan which lists contacts, who's going to do what, how we're going to handle social media, who's going to respond to the media, who is the statewide spokesperson, who's the local spokesperson. And that's probably the best example we have of a crisis communications plan.</p> <p>It's internal in that most of people plowing snow are employees. All the people plowing snow on state roads are [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] employees. And what we work hard to do is make sure they know we're communicating to the public that the public needs to slow down, take the time. We haven't gone out to a lot of individual truck stations, but we go to a couple of different meetings every year and talk to the supervisors about what either what we're going to do or what we did. So one in the fall and one in the spring. And when I go to those, I always make sure I let them know that we worked really hard on the safety messages. That the work that they do is just incredibly important. Because sometimes they don't feel appreciated. So it's kind of a morale thing.</p> <p>The agency is, in fact all of the state agencies are working on continuity government plans. And I think once we see whatever the final is, we'll put together communications S.O.P thing that kind of goes along with it to support that plan.</p> <p>I think what is important going forward, and we've been struggling or working through it probably since I've been here, technology is advancing rapidly. I mean these things are like ubiquitous [picks up phone]. They weren't even six, seven, eight years ago. So when the web is different and television is different and there are so many different ways to communicate. So our challenge, both internally and externally, is to figure out not just which one way is the best way to get to people, but how can we cover several different ways. Email. Maybe it's a telephone</p>

R7:	<p>message. Maybe it's text. We haven't explored much texting to employees but I think that's going to be kind of the next thing. How do you respond?</p> <p>We've been doing some of the related to violence in the workplace, active shooter drills. So it's just figuring out what's the best way to communicate because you might be someone who was always look at his phone. She might be someone who maybe looks at her desktop once in a while but would rather read something. And there's people who watch TV all the time. So it's just knowing what's the best way. And then there's more than one way. It's just figuring out how you cover all those.</p>
R8:	<p>We do have one in connection to the SEOC to what our role is and what our emergency management folks in this building is and you know what we do. And we have an outdated kind of calling tree crisis communications. It probably hasn't been updated in years. Presumably the structure is good but the names are not that we have on this thing for just you know just a generic kind of thing.</p>
R9:	<p>Whether they're for profit, nonprofit, government, most everyone will have some kind of business continuity plan to keep the organization going, to keep it operating. You know, we're not going to be in this building, we're going to be in that building. That business continuity plan has some standard operating procedures that cover all sorts of events: natural disasters, fire, power outages, on and on.</p> <p>Crisis management is about ensuring that those ops play out the way they're supposed to. Because more times than not they don't, and then you have people kind of making it up on the fly and making it up in a way that doesn't reflect our values, doesn't fulfill audience expectations, isn't going to support our strategic objectives. And that's where you want a crisis management team not second guessing. But being apprised so that they can help those folks who were in the field arrive at the right place, make the right decision, and not just make it up.</p> <p>So crisis management, crisis communications being one small component of it, is just a process. It's just going through the basic steps to ensure that the recipe that is being executed... is doing what it's supposed to.</p> <p>[What about the idea of communication pieces like holding statements?]</p> <p>I mean, those are real. Those are all good. But in the end, they have to... I will be honest with you. Every quote unquote holding statement was pretty canned. All it did was provide a bit of a formula. But in the end, it was revamped and rewritten for the circumstances for right now. Had we not had them, we still would have</p>

R9:	<p>landed with that same message. But you know again the urgency here. And this is where we try to slow folks down.</p> <p>When St. Louis University had students and non-students occupy the campus roughly eight weeks after Michael Brown was killed, the same sort of thing was playing out at other colleges and universities campuses as well. We arrived in a place that no one ever expected and the president remained in office unlike other institutions where presidents were fired or resigned. And part of the reason was they responded to people saying, 'you have to say something. Social media is blowing up.' OK, social media is blowing up. Are they our audiences? What do they expect from us? Are there other voices who can weigh in on our behalf at that time? No matter what we said right then and there publicly, it was just going to be no win, one way or another.</p> <p>More than anything our audience really was internal our students our staff and our faculty. And that's what we focused on. Alumni? Certainly. Trustees and others internally. But it really was focusing on what do they expect from us. And that is the push to get out with this statement. You know just to say something. We got everyone to slow down and think, 'what is something we can say that is going to be of value to me in the end?'</p> <p>I'll be honest. We over communicated. We were issuing videos and e-mail statements and letters and having small group meetings larger group meetings where people could be heard, where people could ask questions and that was all extraordinarily effective than just responding to you know hundreds and hundreds of tweets and posts on Facebook. Once we got in the groove and we knew what our strategy was going to be and how we were going to respond and messaging was easy to use it was when we knew it was going to resonate with our primary audience. And the people who were throwing the bombs really were not... they were not students or staff or faculty.</p>
R10:	<p>They're realizing that the sun is out on a beautiful Tuesday. But you're going to have a stormy night. And so when things are calm, they realize that you need to put a crisis communications plan in place. You need to have a crisis communications team identified, and you need to practice before the event. It's like an insurance policy. You know, you would never own a home or have an apartment without insurance. You would never drive a car without insurance because when something goes wrong, you can mitigate the damage faster and it costs you less money.</p> <p>The really good organizations identify the fact that they're having a really good day but they're going to have a bad day. They understand the crisis is a when, not an if. And they prepare for it. And so when it does happen it's not quite as scary. I</p>

R10:	<p>mean, the incident itself is difficult but you're not trying to figure out who do I need to put in the room, what I need to say. Imagine if you're in manufacturing or let's say in the agricultural world... let's say that you were in the ag world and you had a company that did aerial spraying and you don't have a crisis plan in place for when your plane crashes into a school or into a community. It's going to happen. And so the organizations that say it does happen, you are going to be able to communicate quickly and effectively. Because it's very emotional. Pretty scary. Pretty sad. All kinds of things are going on.</p> <p>Or workplace violence. If you have a manufacturing site and someone comes in with a gun like at FedEx and starts shooting the place up. How difficult is it going to be to react? You're not going to have much in the way of information. So you're going to have to fall back on your protocols, which are express concern for people, talk about cooperation with the authorities, talk about what you're trying to do to mitigate the problem, the hurt, the injury. And you can't think that way, you can't think logically, when everything is swirling around you. So the best organizations realize that it's a when not an if. They identify their team. They practice, and they wait for something bad to happen because it happens to everybody.</p> <p>Most importantly... you get to talk to people internally first. We like to say it's, 'tell the family news before you tell the outside world.' For example, let's say you have an incident at your location and you're going to do a news conference or you're going to release things to the public. Maybe you do a press conference or statement. You should always make sure that your people know what you're going to say to the outside world before you say it to the outside world for a couple of reasons. It builds trust. It places them in a position of importance because it's family talking. And when it's family, it diminishes the rumor mill.</p> <p>If you start communicating early and often with your employees, the leaks will be fewer. So it's a large fire and explosion and you communicate quickly internally about what happened and what you're doing about it. That's going to help you because let's say that explosion was caused by bad maintenance. Well everybody in that room knows that you haven't been following your maintenance protocols. But if you bring them in under the tent they're less likely to tell the outside world that. We believe in the theory that the lack of communication creates distance and distance creates distrust. Lack of communication creates distance and distance creates distrust.</p> <p>So what we're saying here is you have to communicate because if you don't, the rumors will start from your own people, in particular. Why aren't they telling us more? Something must be wrong. The doors are always closed. So the rumor mill starts and they lose confidence in you as a leadership team.</p>
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R10:	<p>I would say we're seeing an uptick in preparedness when we speak all over the country in crisis preparedness and a variety of events. And the audiences are never small and they're getting bigger. You know it is a very, very, hot topic. We'll speak at a half dozen events this fall for hospital associations, other kinds of statewide associations, and we've got this prime spot at the table. Keynote. Because that's the demand. People want to learn more about the crisis in crisis response and how to prepare for it. We're seldom the last thing on the agenda.</p>
R11:	<p>I always like to use the analogy with my clients of dropping a stone in a lake and watching those rings go out from a stone. And so the closest ring is internal audience employees and then it goes out to customers and vendors and suppliers. And you know their elected representative of the industry trade associations and then eventually the media which is essential. And I would include traditional social media on that as a means to reach all of those audiences.</p> <p>So when I do or think about communications planning, I always think of it like that. It's employees, it's customers, relevant communities, and the news media. So I would put it at a very high priority. And one of the things you have to figure out is what's the situation. And is it appropriate for employees to be carrying some of the message. And if so, how much of it and at what point do you want to clamp it down and say, 'please don't comment on that. This is a legal matter, for example, and we really need to have a single spokesperson for our organization so please refer all inquiries to this person.' And you might give them like what I call a standby statement. "Here's what you can say in response. Well I know our company is involved in that case. I really can't discuss it. And here's the number. Name and number. The person you can talk to about that.' So I call that kind of like a little bit of a standby statement. But maybe you give employees something to say but you don't put the burden on them carrying a more complicated or difficult message?</p> <p>[How do you make that determination?]</p> <p>I think it all depends. I think it all depends on what is the crisis and is it something that is general enough kind of topic that you know there's two or three points that could be made with customers or other important audiences. I mean it's hard to say, 'no, you can't talk about this at all.' Especially with this huge organization because you know they're going to cocktail parties, there's neighbors, there's family members. So giving them something that they can say I think is generally a good idea. But just trying to put some parameters around it obviously realizing you don't have complete control over that.</p>

Q21: What are some lessons that you've learned during a crisis that could help others?	
R1:	<p>Well I don't know that this was a lesson learned because I think we started from here, but it's really important to keep your internal employees and internal stakeholders well informed. I mean, there's an old cliché that you know your internal stakeholders are your most important external voices and that's true too.</p> <p>So I know that during the strike employees from all over [NAME OF COMPANY] would be asked by their neighbors and people they see at church or in the supermarket, 'you know what's going on over there? You guys still on strike? What's the deal?' And just making sure that you can't control what they're going to say but making sure that they have access to accurate information to respond. That is super important.</p> <p>And then I think a lesson learned, not sort of rocket science here but, it's always prepare for the worst. You know as bad as you think it it's going to be prepare for it to be ten times worse. And even if 99 times out of 100 it isn't the one time it is, you'll be glad you did. And so that just involves kind of really pushing yourself to say, 'what? That's probably not going to happen so we don't really need to worry about that.' Well you know probably sometimes is good if it can happen. And think about weather if it does happen, how bad is it going to be if you don't have something ready and get ready.</p>
R2:	<p>I'd say the final thing about internal comms that's interesting, and I just realized this as I was talking to you. Is that, it's the one part of communications where you're learning curve never stops because you'll always be surprised by employees.</p> <p>Reporters will not surprise you, generally speaking. They are generally the same everywhere you go. You'll have a couple of dicks and you'll have a couple of princes. But by and large, they're sort of on track. If you deal with one, you deal with them all. Internal, it's always changing. Every culture is different. Regions of the country are different. Expectations are different. And humanity comes up with crazy shit. And so you'll deal with circumstances you'll never contemplated before.</p> <p>The lesson there for me, and I would suggest for you is, really keep track of this stuff and compile it not in your head, then on paper. You know, these are the range of things I've dealt with and here's how I handled it well, and here is how I didn't handle it well.</p> <p>The reason why I send my staff crises, like the store shooting, was not because I was worried about local press because I could handle that remotely. It was because the lesson I learned is that all too often there who can help coordinate the human side. HR is generally not set up for that. Or if they are, the people</p>

R2:	<p>doing it generally know the victim themselves and feel as traumatizes everybody else, and therefore less capable of handling it. I didn't realize I had had learned that lesson until I had started talking to you. But that's why forget it because I've been doing this for 20 years. You know some point in my career I watched this from afar and thought, 'shit. I wish I had somebody there.' And now anytime something happens I send somebody there. It's worth the plane ticket.</p> <p>So what I would say is the core takeaway is: it's always changing and if it's always changing, you have to work harder at learning the lessons and extrapolating for next time. Whereas external which is essentially a pattern you can replicate over and over again.</p>
R3:	<p>Actually, I've done some study myself this semester of crisis communication, and kind of along this theme of helping the organization right size our communications. One of the things that was helpful for me to think about, is the spectrum of an issue or crisis. In this class I took, we talked a lot about what is an issue that just is something that needs managing. It could evolve into crisis, but it's different. Compared to a true crisis that the unpredictability, that has the huge organizational risk.</p> <p>It's important in the moment to be able to distinguish which end of the spectrum you're on. Because the response is very different. We talked a lot about what is the tipping point. And the literature suggest, and this is based on faculty at Harvard studying emergency and crisis responders and how they respond. And they've identified something called novelty, which is that tipping point. And it is that point at which the situation changes to become a true crisis, or has characteristics of a true crisis. The unpredictability. Something that going to tax your organization. It can't be done during the normal course of business. It is going to require dedicated resources, money, people. Probably is going to last a while. Probably not something that you can handle in an hour.</p> <p>So these unique circumstances require things we talked about. Really planning around structure. Decision-making. Managing expectations. That's much different than handling an issue. And so for us, it was really... we were spending a lot of time helping leadership, in particular, and ourselves determine where we are on that spectrum. And what that means and what we need. The sort of support and participation we need in each of those different instances.</p>
R4:	<p>I would say that really being thoughtful about timing. So really looking at the end-to-end process and thinking through what do leaders need to know and when? How can we make our messaging as concrete as possible and be specific? Is there a way to sort of start with the more simple message and then build on that in</p>

R4:	<p>subsequent communication to get to people so there is a little bit more time to work? I think those were kind of the key learnings.</p> <p>I would also say again, I can't overestimate the importance of... at least we found in our organization is that people want to hear things directly from their manager or their supervisor. So I think it's very important and it's worth it to spend the time really ensuring leaders are equipped to be able to speak to what's happening and they will be able to work from a common core set of messages so that people across organizations are getting some consistency in what they're hearing but they're hearing it from a source that they want to hear it from which in our case is really the manager or supervisor.</p> <p>And I would say also whatever your leaders are willing to commit to upfront that you really transparent about that and that there is more of that stage-setting in the beginning.</p> <p>Also just that people have mechanisms for asking questions or having dialogue in safe spaces to respond to what's happening. Personally I think that sort of face-to-face approach for us was the most effective because it gives people the ability to ask their questions but in the past when we've used more anonymous mechanisms that has invited people to share concerns or questions in a way that was less productive. And so this way I think you know people have the ability to ask but there was also some degree of you're still having to own how you're responding in and own how you're reacting. And I think for us, at least, the face-to-face basis being able to ask questions was a good way to do it.</p>
R5:	<p>Putting the time and resources that need to be on crisis comms. Because anytime you deal with a situation, the first thing somebody says is, 'do we have a communications plan?' It's literally one of the first questions everyone asks. So I'm sure they are proactively putting the time in to really get in places what needs to be in place is, I think, the biggest place for either success or failure. Literally it is the first thing that comes up. So with that in mind, we just need to shift our thinking to be a key focus and we should have dedicated resources to it. And it shouldn't be just a tack on responsibility. There needs to be good thought to it.</p>
R6:	<p>I think probably the biggest lesson that I would encourage is preparedness. Understanding what those issues are that could develop or could knock your industry off track and then preparing for them ahead of time. We like to think with our vulnerabilities assessment that there are issues that we manage that we're able to either move out of the way of the industry or move the industry around. And then if we're not able to do that, that we are continually preparing for dealing with those issues. Making sure that we've got the research and the resources and the tools that we need to deal with that issue and then evaluating</p>

R6:	<p>afterwards how we dealt with it and what we can do to be better next time. Continuous improvement is critical when it comes to crisis management as well.</p> <p>There's always new tools available to us. And for instance, when H1N1 was here social media was just in its infancy and there was really no social media during H1N1. It really didn't play a part in it. And today you'll have crises that exist almost solely on social media or that's the driving of the crisis. So but not being fearful of something like social media. But understanding how you can use that for your benefit, whether it is in communicating your message to specific audiences or in monitoring what that issue is so that you can you know more than what you would have even just a few years ago. And looking at engagement, understanding OK it's a tool but how do I use that tool. So you're embracing the technology that exists today as opposed to just being concerned about how it may be damaging to the crisis, but how can I take that and use it.</p> <p>Well we have staff that are all over the country. With these organizations working together there are staff literally all over the country. And some, well I guess they're all based in the U.S., but some that travel internationally continuously too. So we try to do as much face-to-face as is appropriate. We try to do on Skype as well so that if you're not physically in the office you can still Skype in and either hear it or see it. Sometimes the best way to convince someone everything is ok is by the look on your face. But then we always follow it up with an email with the details of what we talked about, what was covered in the meeting. So they've got a hard copy of it as well.</p> <p>The biggest thing or one of the things that is very important is it's sometimes really hard to get other people excited about crisis planning when you're not in a crisis. But drill drills are really important and dealing with the issues are really important and what will knock you off track faster than anything else in an actual crisis is someone who either didn't come to the drill, isn't familiar with their role in the plan, or thinks that you should take a different route because they aren't fully engaged. Why the strategy was developed the way that it is. So encouraging others in non-crisis time to know what their role is in the plans, participate in drills. To me that's something that everybody I know, my peers who work in crisis and other industries, we all talk about that as a huge struggle. And if somebody has the answer to that let me know.</p>
R7:	<p>Well, like I said, I've become more of a believer that what you should do is have a consistent communication process rather than every so often. I mean, depending on the crisis it could be every day, every couple of days. But you should put something out on that periodic basis at the same time, like 10 a.m. every other day you put out a note to all the employees that says what you know. Even if you</p>

R7:	<p>don't know anything. Just so they know that someone's thinking about them and that they can stay tuned to this channel and they'll hear something.</p> <p>And again, you got to send it out more than one way because 30 percent of the people get their news from where? Is it TV? You probably know the answer. TV? Newspapers? Radio? So you got to try and hit them all. But it's got to be regular, consistent. And that's where you get your credibility.</p>
R9:	<p>Well OK so let's go to advice. So one of the things we've learned over the years is to try and get organizations to go down a path and get them to land on strategy and tactics and messages rather than us telling them. Because we're arriving in circumstances with a factory being shut down or a campus protest or a recall of a drug. We don't necessarily know anything about the marketplace. And so, us just coming in brashly saying 'well this is what you need to do,' is going to go over like a lead balloon. So instead, we take them through a kind of a process of asking questions and they're smart people. They're smarter than me. They know their audiences. They know where their strategic objectives lie. They know their values. Most folks usually land in a good place.</p> <p>Where our advice comes in is when all of a sudden there's an impulsive desire to want to lash out, to kick. That's often because of the immediacy. We'll just say, 'let's wait a minute. Let's stop.' Crisis management clients have to be on board and they are more likely to be on board by them arriving in that place rather than us telling them you need to be in that place. We always have a good sense of OK where should we be going with this. But you know again, I don't know the marketplace the way they do and sometimes it's asking questions and having them discover things that they wouldn't otherwise have discovered. Because you had people in the room and they're sharing information and data... being connected that would otherwise wouldn't have been connected.</p> <p>In terms of understanding who our audience are, understanding their expectation, understanding how this might affect their business or their perception of it, in the end really all they care about... if I make breakfast sandwiches and if I'm selling them at food service companies around the country, if all of a sudden my factory gets shut down, all those food service companies who've been relying on me to provide them with my product to their customers their only concern is their own customer base. They really don't care about me. So we have to figure out a way to be certain that our response is mindful of who those audiences are. If you have priority customers, how do you find back-up facilities? How can you move supplies to those back-up facilities? How do you ensure that you can get the products that are bought by those key customers rolling? So you're trying to be the least disruptive as possible. Now those are all actions and those are all significant</p>

R9:	<p>actions, because if you don't take them you're going to lose those customers. Then it's easy to say, 'hey this is what we're doing for you.'</p> <p>Honestly, just get out of the office and get to know their employees. Get to know what the informal leaders are of this department or that department or that shift. Because you, going back to your initial observation about building relationships, have people you can go to and say, 'hey what are you hearing? Is this playing well? What do you think?' That's all in how you need to make smarter decisions about what you're going to do and what you're going to say.</p> <p>And I will tell you, too many communications people... too many internal communications people spend too much time in their office. And the more we get to know the internal lay of the land, the more assurances we have about providing a point of view, and understanding the language that's going to connect with our audience.</p> <p>The pendulum is swinging back to the import of internal communications. So I think during, particularly the great recession when organizations, non-profits, government agencies, for-profit making companies were cutting back, paring back in one way or another either by reductions in force, they euphemistically call it, or people leaving and those positions remaining vacant, one of the things that they were cutting was internal communications. We'll let legal deal with that. Let someone do it. And it got short-shifted, and I think we're finding there is an increasing attention to really building a good, strong employee culture and looking for opportunities to listen, opportunities for conversation. And strategically that's very, very wise. Whether because they can help you in a crisis... but they can also help you with everyday problem solving about whether you're providing a service, or a product, or whatever. The better way to do things is a smart way to do things. That's the way to do things.</p> <p>They need to really understand the audience. And if I don't know, but I do know who I can talk to who can give me a sense that's what's important. To not shrug their shoulders and say, 'I don't know. I don't know how they're going to react.' That's not a good response. 'I don't know, but I think I know who could give us an idea,' is a much better response.</p> <p>Put simply, you're going to have employees with you. If they feel that they're involved in some way that they're helping resolve it directly or indirectly, they want to know. And if they're treated with respect and dignity, they may help resolve the crisis. Otherwise, you're going to be digging yourself out of a hole with your employees and it's just not a good place to be.</p>
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R10:	<p>Listen more than you speak. Internal communications is really important because... listen to your people. Listen to your people before the event. Listen to people during the event. Listen to your people after the event. We tell senior leadership be omni-visible, omni-present.</p> <p>Just last week I was elsewhere and told the leadership of a manufacturing site you need to be on the floor more often than not because if you're sitting in your office they're going to think something is up. Get out there. Be hyper vigilant. Be hyper visible. Just get out there. Be seen. That's number one.</p> <p>Communicate. Take the time to acknowledge that there's a problem and people are frightened. Maybe they're concerned about their jobs. And be very human. And when you can't tell them stuff, listen, listen, listen, listen. You're going to know. When your building is too quiet, You're going to know it that means they've stopped trusting you because they stopped talking to you.</p>
R11:	<p>I'm sure you've heard this before, but one tried and true principle is that the CEO is always the spokesperson in a major crisis. They are the ones talking to employees. They are the ones talking to the media. You know, a PR person can be the person coordinating messages and issuing statements and being the fast breaking kind of liaison for the media, employees, etc. But in the event of a major crisis you can have an excellent reputation in the community but it can be gone very, very quickly by missteps. And of course, the classic one that just happened with United Airlines. Which as a communications person that was absolutely unbelievable to me. To watch it unfold and whoever was directing this effort was basically violating crisis communications 101. His message was to show off. You know blaming that gentleman and was dragged off a plane, like oh my god. So kudos in getting your CEO in front of media. But you know a D-minus on the message. So yeah, that's the one for sure.</p> <p>I think bringing employees into the loop on a crisis situation is just smart. Sometimes I think companies feel like, 'oh, we don't want to tell them. We don't want to tell them that.' Would rather have them read it in the newspaper, in the online media in an hour? Why don't we tell them and share our perspective on the matter? So I think overcoming any kind of reluctance that we really don't want to talk about this with our own people is critical because... you know, talk about the trust issue. If you aren't willing to share with employees that hey we made a mistake and it's in the headlines, that's really going to hurt trust and credibility in an organization.</p> <p>And the third principle would be that whatever's being said outside should be all that being said inside the organization. There should be consistency between what's being said and how the organizations are responding across those</p>

R11:	<p>audiences. That's going to hurt credibility and trust if you've got one message to employees and then what comes out of the Wall Street Journal is entirely different. You never know when those internal messages are going to leak out. So that's another reason that they should be consistent.</p> <p>I remember talking to Neil St. Anthony of the Star Tribune when we had a big deal announcement pending. And he and I were together at [NAME OF COMPANY]. He was calling me and he said, 'I realized you're going to have to go no comment on me, but I got asked the question.' And he did, and of course I couldn't. Because we are getting ready to announce in like a day or something. And he said, 'well, kudos to you guys.' Because maybe we made the announcement and he called me and he didn't get a leg up there. In other words, employees are calling the media because they're not getting the straight story inside. And there's a lot of ways our social media or employees can kind of put pressure on an organization that looks like they're up to something.</p> <p>I think the stronger the culture, the stronger sense of trust there is between management and employees the less likely that is to happen. The employees don't feel like they have to go outside the company to get to the story, to get the truth. But they feel like they are getting it internally.</p> <p>I just worked with a company and I'm going say I cannot disclose anything about it. They had a very difficult situation externally and they kept employees in the loop. They didn't have anyone looking outside for any additional information because they were getting it all from the leadership.</p>
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Q22: Is there anything else you'd like to add regarding this topic?	
R1:	<p>I would encourage anyone who is in the business to familiarize themselves with some of that, to your points I mean, you know being prepared is so, so important. Because crisis by its very nature is something that can move fast and get out of control quickly. And the more you can sort of have... even just in terms of a process to how to think about things is going to stand you in good stead when you're in the heat of the moment, especially in the media. So you know sort of we have to take things incredibly fast.</p>
R4:	<p>We had a really close partnership with our PR colleagues so that sort of unified partnership for both what could become public information and information that was going to employee was really, really important. So that is just... I think really no matter what kind of crisis communication it is, having that really solid partnership is absolutely essential. And our particular PR group, the lead for the group, she sees things from a public perspective and always comes back to the</p>

R4:	employee perspective as well. So she has a sort of natural inclination to do that based on her experience and that makes things much more helpful in terms of feeling confident that we were thinking through this from all of the different perspectives we needed to have.
R6:	The relationships with all your different audiences that you're going to be working with are just critical. The media clearly are one of my primary audiences and just having those relationships and being able to pick up the phone and they know that I'm not feeding them a line that I really need to put this out right now is critical. And we actually do drills with media, not from a standpoint of hey come and cover our crisis management, but OK so if we were to have enough of the outbreak what would your role be in response to a disease outbreak.
R7:	<p>The Gov's office can be pretty prescriptive in what it wants you to talk about and what you shouldn't talk about it. You don't want the commissioner badmouthing the governor, for instance. So you want the governor to deliver all the political messages. There were some things about that shutdown that really annoyed employees. Like it was 20 days and they didn't get paid. The shutdown cost [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] in excess of 30 million dollars because the claims made by projects that got shut down and that money just came out of [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]'s budget. We didn't get anything extra from the legislature for it. So what that meant was that it got spread around and we had a close to three billion dollar a year in budget so 30 million may not seem like much. But if a million dollars is taken out of your budget and you have a two million dollar budget, that's a big deal.</p> <p>So I think I wish we had done a little better job during of just pushing stuff out. Like I said, [NAME], he was a big one for a just... if you don't have anything new to report, just reach out and say here's the situation, there is really nothing new to report, but I just want to touch base with you. At the time, I didn't think that was... I mean once a week or once every couple of days is ok. Not all the time. Not every time you had a whim. But now I think about it and I think well, I did get some e-mails from people saying I wish you had communicated more. There was nothing to communicate. Well then tell them that. Maybe we should have done the voicemails every day and we should have done e-mail every couple of days. Just say, 'good morning! Here's the joke of the day! Nothing new to report but keep tuning back in.' Because at least they keep somewhat engaged if they want to be. And some people suffer for 20 days and some people looked at it as a free vacation of sorts.</p>

R9:	<p>About eight weeks ago there was a call for a boycott of a product and in one day there were 2,500 posts on Facebook or Twitter calling for this boycott. 2,500. And there was a drive. 'We have to say something. If we don't say something, we look 'guilty.'" That's what was being presented. And we took a very different view. Which was, 'are these your customers or not?' These are not your customers. Then why do you need to weigh in? Because if you do weigh in then will your customers respond? We were silent, and another communications consultant very much opposed to silence. We have to say something. But it was for us... we were saying, 'what's the point? What's the purpose? How does this connect with our key audiences? How does this fulfill our values?' All those things.</p> <p>The next day the number of calls for the boycott with down to 100 in one day. The next, less than a dozen. Why? Because a couple of reasons. The big voices. We talk about power of voice and share of voices in social media. And they quickly moved on to other things they were giving their attention to. This one kind of fell by the wayside and other things took place in the news. Recognize the immediacy and how quickly things will come and go, even with 2,500 posts. They are not significant voices that really drive this kind of action. Those significant voices took a pass.</p>
R10:	<p>I think it's overlooked. I think companies get so focused on what are we going to say to the street. What are we to say to the investment community? What are we going to say to the media? What are we going to say to our shareholders? They forget sometimes. They absolutely forget. They write their external messages. 'Oh yeah, we should probably create one for internal.' Start inside and work out. Start inside and work out.</p> <p>It's like building a really pretty house and decorating it with white kitchens and hardwood floors, but you have a crappy foundation. If you don't build a good foundation, everything else you build is going to fall down. And your internal communications is building the foundation for your organization. If your people trust you and your customers trust you, then who cares what the rest of the world thinks. It's your foundation. It's disappointing to hear that, that there's not more research on internal communications because it basically says that organizations are taking their people for granted. And that's just never ok.</p> <p>One of the things that we've created in our model is have an entire team and person that does internal communications and then an external communication person. All too often in a crisis it's one person. You're creating messaging. I like the model where you have the internal and external. You're saying the same thing and you're crafting the message together but then you split apart. And this team deals with all the outside distractions and you deal with all of the internal. And I think</p>

R10:	<p>that's a good model of how the external team and the internal team and have them come together to create the messaging and then split. Because otherwise you have the same people trying to react to the environment out there which is very different from the reaction that you're going get internally.</p> <p>We all benefit when we look inward and examine what we're all about, what we do, how we treat people, how we react to things, how prepared we are. That makes us better people. And when companies do that, when they look internally and prepare and be honest with themselves and say we got some problems we've got to be ready for them, and then talk to the family first, I think you're in good shape.</p>
R11:	<p>Sometimes being proactive isn't me breaking the story. Sometimes being proactive means you are prepared to respond in an instant if the story starts to roll. And that would mean you've got a statement, a letter developed to employees. And again, I still recommend you use the drop a stone in the water thing. You roll to employees first, then customers, communities, and then media.</p> <p>Yes, I like to say it's like the Boy Scout motto, 'Be Prepared.' And how that preparation takes shape is really dependent on so many different things: the organization, what the issue is, what sort of external agencies or organizations might be driving this story. You know it all just depends. Even within the context of it all, it depends but you can still be prepared.</p> <p>We've worked with just having everything locked and loaded and ready to go in case we need it. And sometimes it isn't needed. Sometimes we have it but if we needed it we just we can roll so quickly.</p> <p>I think it's important to have some kind of a vehicle for feedback. In very high functioning environments employees will be talking to management or to their supervisor and giving them that feedback. But of course the bigger the organization, that less that maybe happens. So then having that kind of a confidential loop back is a good idea.</p>